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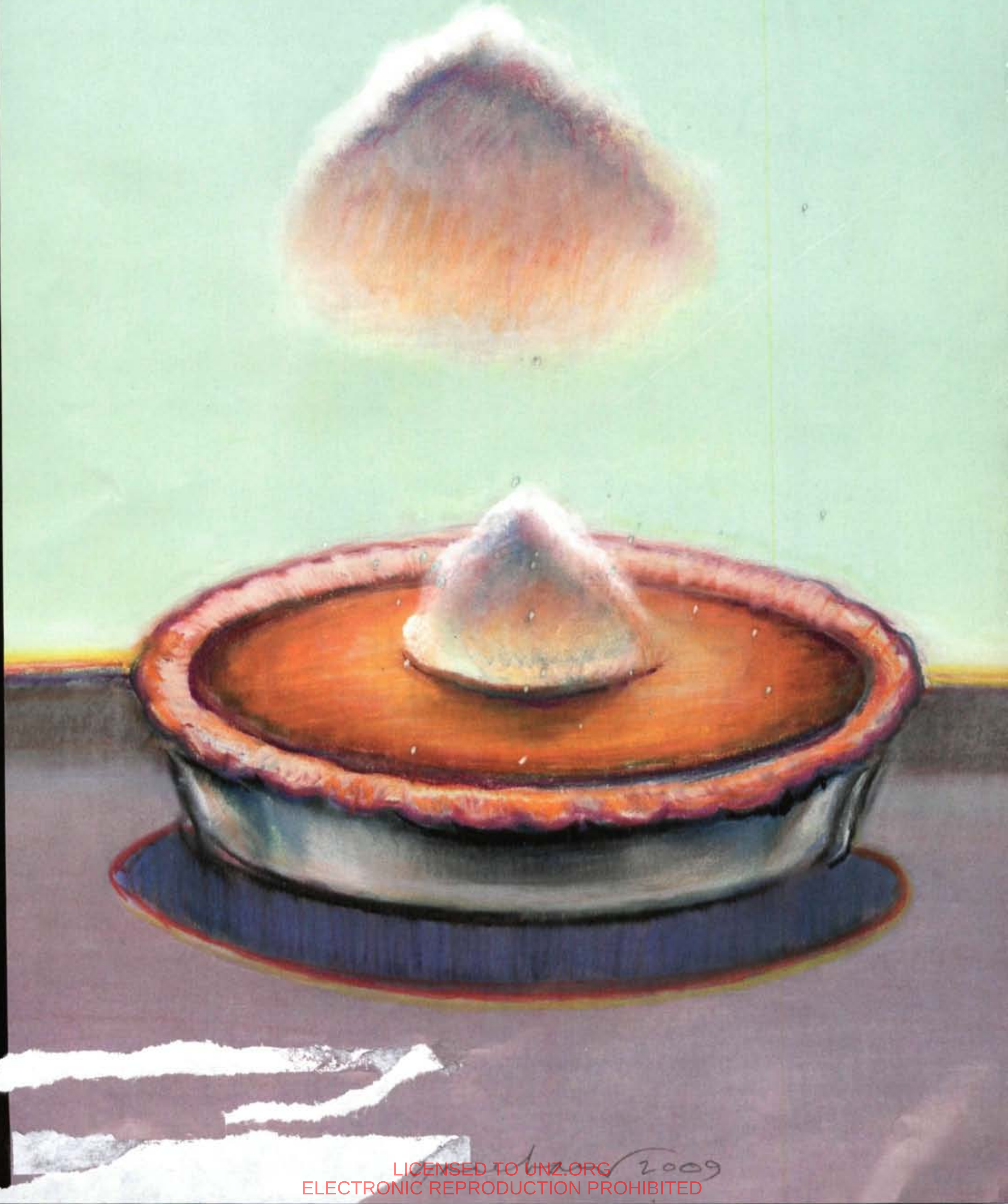
NOV. 23, 2009



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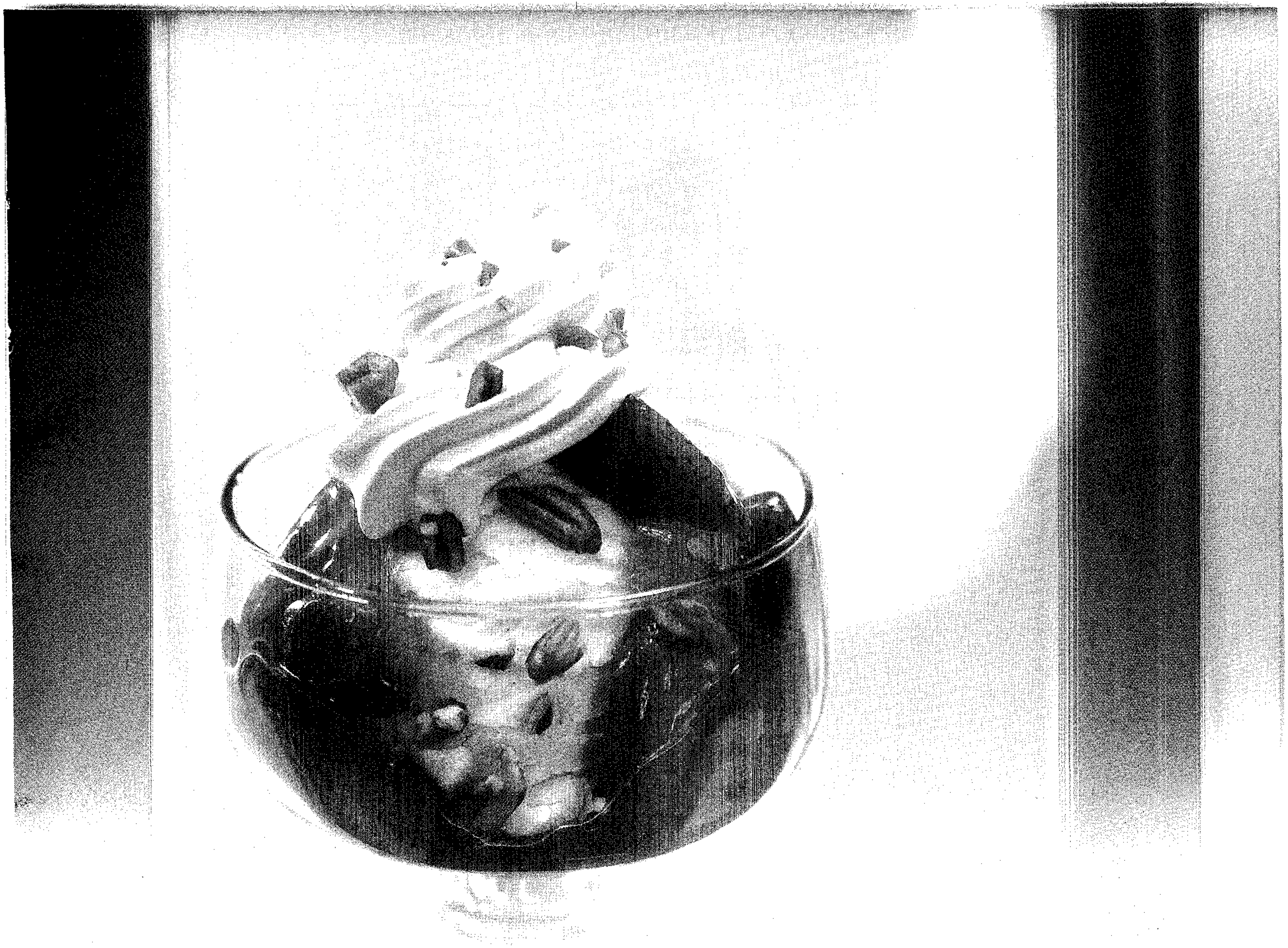

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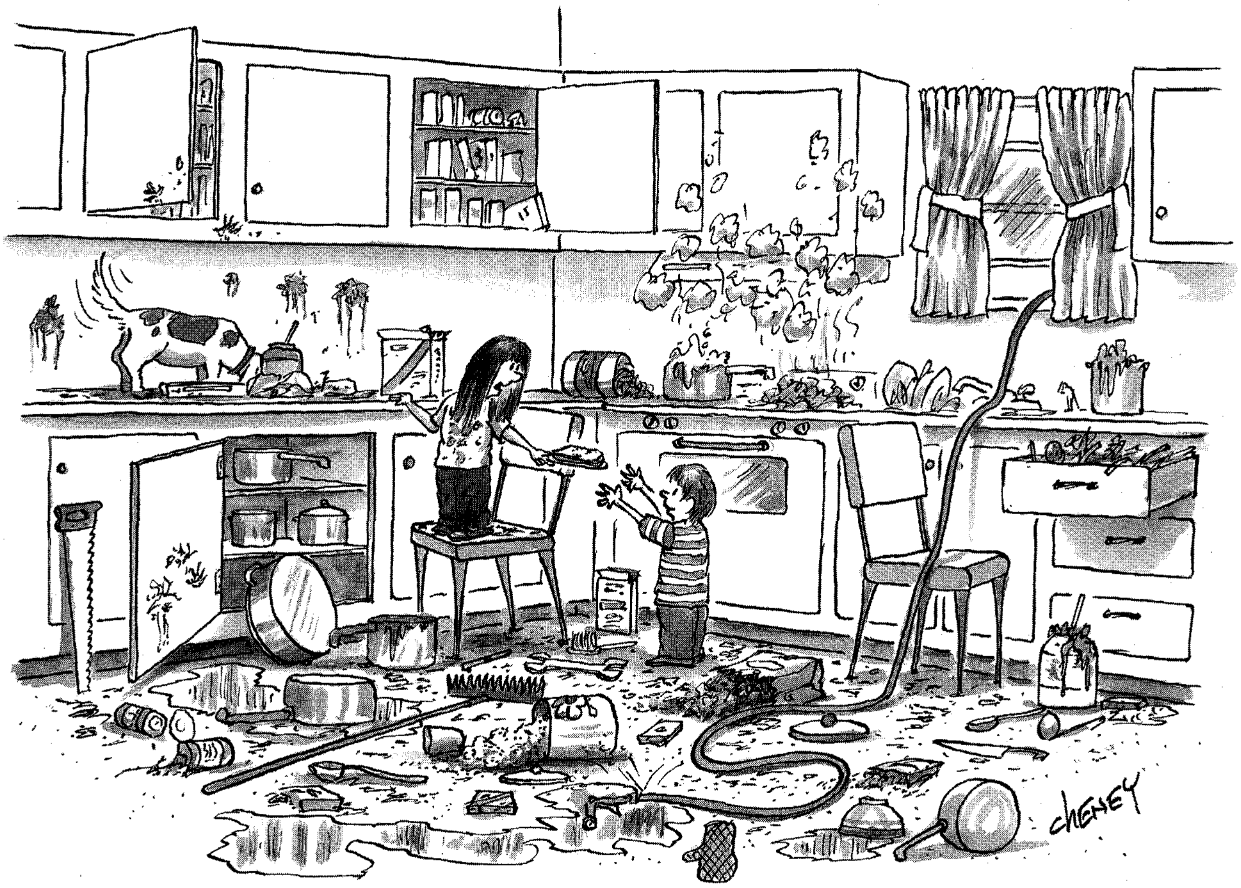
SPOTS *Emmanuel Pierre*



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CONTRIBUTORS

John Colapinto ("Lunch with M.," p. 44) is a staff writer and the author of "As Nature Made Him" and "About the Author."

Jeffrey Toobin (Comment, p. 37) won the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," which is available in paperback.

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Sam Shepard (Fiction, p. 100), a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, has a book of short stories, "Day Out of Days," coming out in January.

Adam Gopnik (A Critic at Large, p. 106) is the author of, most recently, "Angels and Ages: A Short Book About Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life."

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 118), the magazine's architecture critic, has two new books out: "Building Up and Tearing Down" and "Why Architecture Matters."

Wayne Thiebaud (Cover; Illustration, p. 75) is Professor Emeritus of Art at the University of California, Davis. A travelling retrospective of his work is currently on view at the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

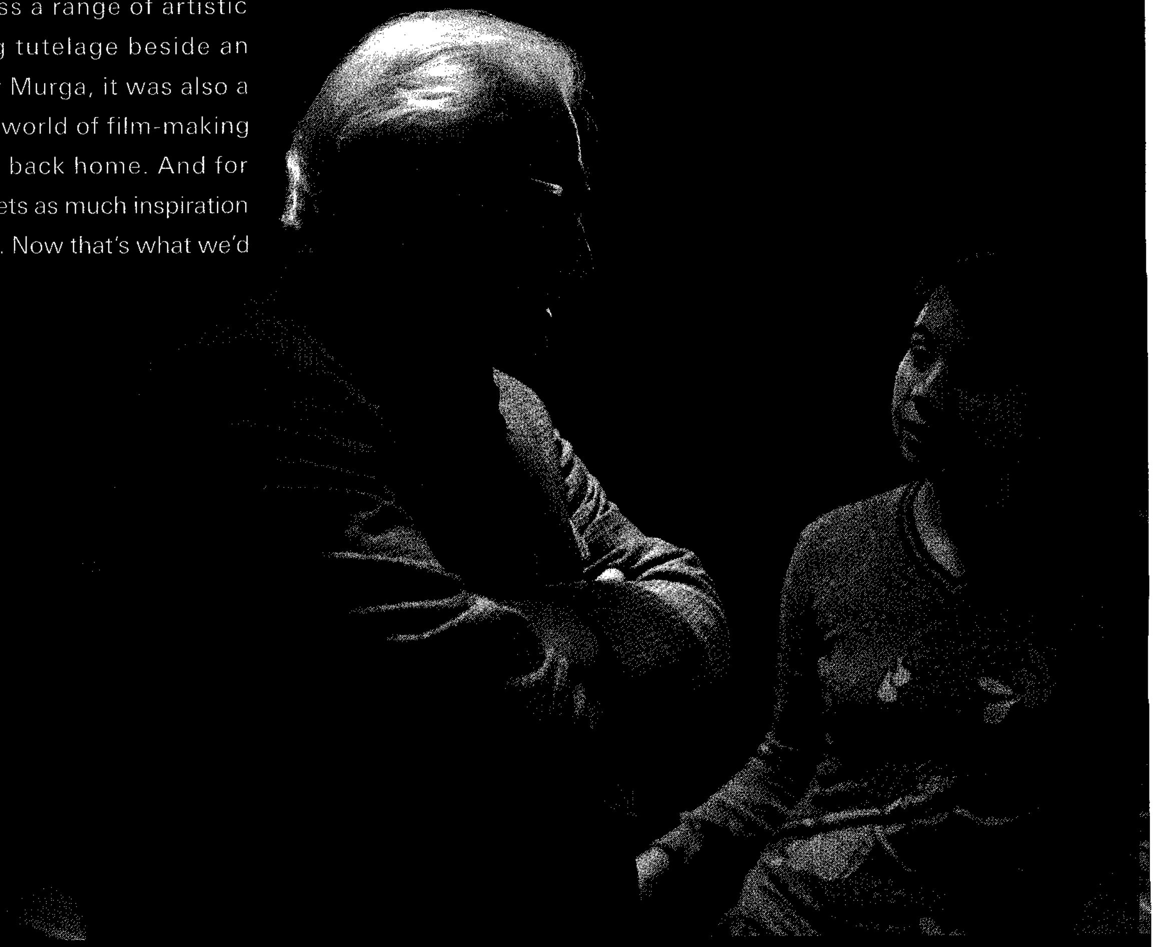
John Colapinto chats with readers about the Michelin guide. / Video: *James Surowiecki* interviews the TARP overseer Elizabeth Warren; *Evan Osnos* on wine in China; *Jorge Colombo's* Finger Painting; *Richard Brody* on "Two Lovers." / Audio: *Calvin Trillin* eats poutine; *Yiyun Li* reads a John McGahern story; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts the Political Scene. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* and *George Packer* on politics; *John Cassidy* on the economy; *Macy Halford* on books; *Amy Davidson* on football; and much more. / The Cartoon Kit, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

FOR CELINA MURGA, IT WAS THE ULTIMATE MOVIE MASTERCLASS.

A YEAR IN CLOSE-UP WITH MARTIN SCORSESE.

The Rolex
Mentor *and* Protégé
Arts Initiative

For a young film-maker from Buenos Aires, it seemed like a fantasy – to be taken under the wing of a movie-directing legend. For Celina Murga, the fantasy became reality when she was invited to spend a year, in close-up, with Martin Scorsese. The two artists were brought together through the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative – a program that offers gifted young individuals across a range of artistic disciplines a year-long tutelage beside an established master. For Murga, it was also a journey into a different world of film-making from the one she knew back home. And for Scorsese? "The mentor gets as much inspiration as the protégée," he says. Now that's what we'd call a Hollywood ending.



DANCE
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JASON AKIRA SOMMA

FILM
MARTIN SCORSESE
CELINA MURGA

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SPREADING RUMORS

Elizabeth Kolbert suggests that the disinformation age, one now heavily driven by Internet rumor and falsehood, is largely attributable to the "paranoid style" of the far right, a term first invoked by the late historian Richard Hofstadter (Books, November 2nd). This may be true to a point. However, underlying this paranoid style are interests that define and shape the conspiratorial agendas of both right and left. After all, the current rantings of the birther-Tea Party-Glenn Beck conservatives are hardly random; when the seemingly irrational pieces are put together they form a logical and consistent set of beliefs, one of disdain for minorities (especially a black President, who merits special condemnation), hatred of federal authority, xenophobic nationalism, contempt for "secular" educated élites, and a desire to resurrect traditional "family values" that exclude feminists and gays.
Erik Lindell
East Greenbush, N.Y.

In addition to "cyberpolarization," there is another important democratic dynamic at work in the disappointing vitality of Internet rumor-mongering. While democracy indeed thrives within a marketplace of ideas, it is also true that certain market-goers always yell more loudly than others, and therefore receive more attention. Lobbyists and activists have always been effective beyond the size of their constituencies precisely because of the intensity of their voices. For better or worse, the Internet has provided a megaphone to all who want to yell louder.
Wade Thomson
Chicago, Ill.

THE AUTEUR EFFECT

Richard Brody, in his profile of Wes Anderson, quotes the director as saying, with regard to the relative successes of his "Darjeeling Limited" and Danny Boyle's "Slumdog Millionaire," "Why did this India movie become a big hit and mine didn't?" ("Wild, Wild Wes," November 2nd). What Anderson and Brody fail to consider is that the success of Boyle's "India movie" may have been due, in part, to its use of Indian actors playing Indian characters, in India. All of the main characters in Boyle's movie were Indian. Anderson's "India movie," in contrast, featured white American actors playing out a standard bourgeois American family drama with the use of India (and Indians) as colorful, exotic background.
A. Ron Chowdhury
Los Angeles, Calif.

Brody writes that Anderson "frames his images simply." I would agree that Anderson's mise en scène is direct in its fabrication and, in serving obsessive cohesion down to the minutiae, nearly free of any element that doesn't factor into the creation of the films' respective worlds, but the term "simple" suggests an artlessness that doesn't apply to Anderson's hyperstylized formalism. Whether he's borrowing Jean-Luc Godard's "pendulum" camera movement from "My Life to Live" in order to avoid a classical shot-and-reverse-shot approach during a conversation in "The Royal Tenenbaums," craning through the doll-house-suggesting cross-section of the Belafonte in "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou," or simultaneously highlighting emotional separation and the cramped quarters within "The Darjeeling Limited" 's namesake train through the use of frame-within-a-frame shots of doorways and mirrors, Anderson's technique is richly complex and exacting in a manner befitting his cinephilia and his controlled, idiosyncratic aesthetic.
Mark Mowls
Cleveland, Ohio

•

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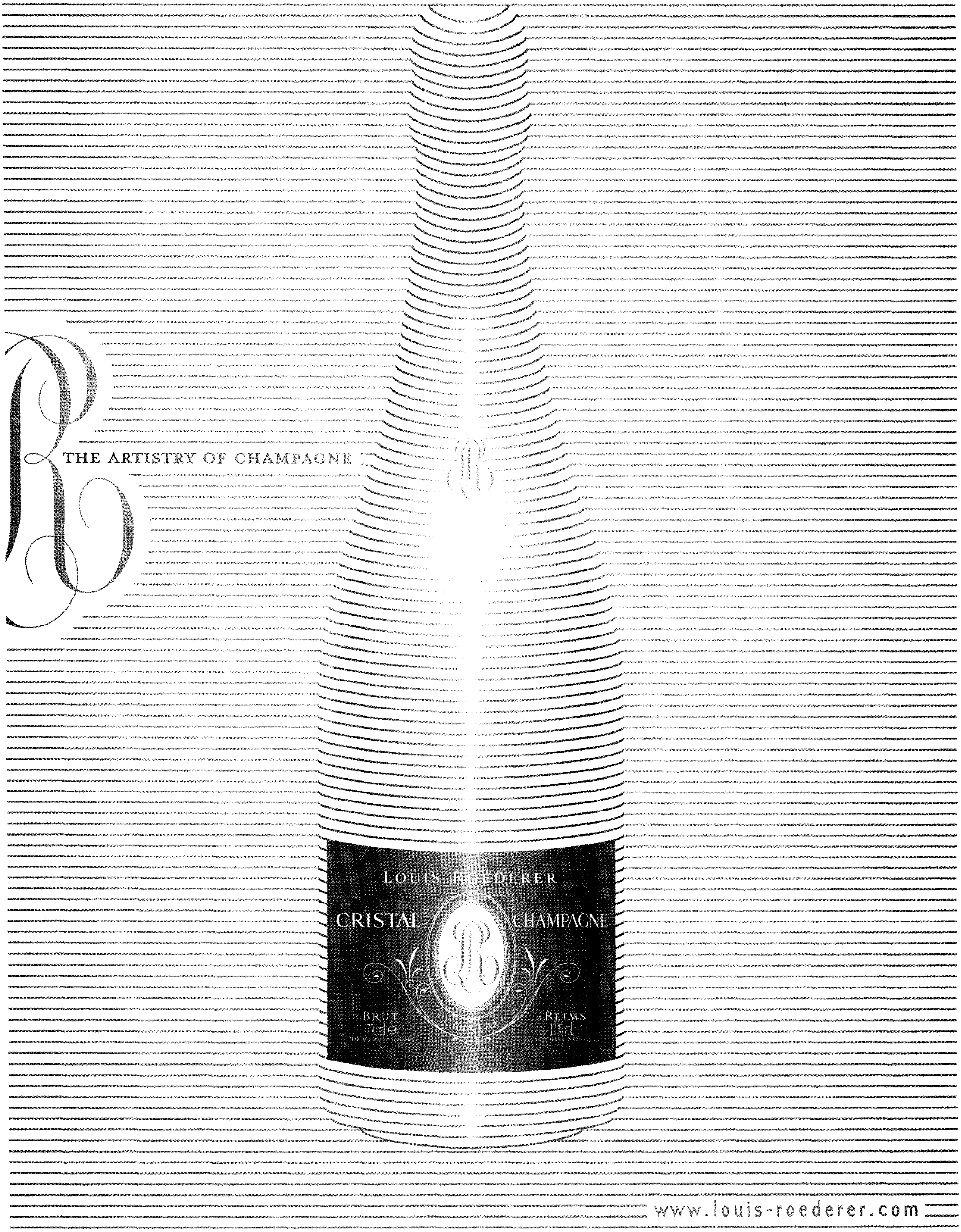
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One secret to the House's success is the source of the grapes. While many producers in the 19th century began procuring fruit from other growers, Louis Roederer opted for another path. He acquired some of the best pieces of land in the Champagne region in order to gain independence and guarantee the quality of the fruit. Similarly, he acquired and commissioned immense cellars on Boulevard Lundy in Reims. Every step of the Champagne-making process was under his control.

Today, Louis Roederer's winemaking team continues to maintain this focus on quality and ingenious expansion. The House's vineyards now allow it to produce more than two-thirds of its overall grape requirements, while new fermenting rooms and cellars accommodate more than nine million bottles. While the majority of the other Houses must buy most of their grapes, Louis Roederer takes the rare privilege of being a largely independent producer with command of its exceptional *terroir.*

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CHAMPAGNE

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Today, Louis Roederer's 500-acre vineyards are planted exclusively in the Premiers and Grand Crus of the three Champagne regions: Côte des Blancs, Montagne de Reims, and Vallée de la Marne. Louis Roederer's belief in the unbreakable link between the land and the glass is evident in the role played today by Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. He is both the Vineyard Director and the Cellar Director. From the berries on the vines to the nectar raised in dark, chalk cellars, he is the person who oversees all the stages of the creation of the House's distinctive style.

THE LOUIS ROEDERER METHOD

After harvest in mid-September and the subsequent delicate pressing, Louis Roederer follows long-held traditions of Champagne making, with its own unique House philosophy. First fermentation occurs in small stainless steel tanks and wooden vats in Reims. The juice of each individual parcel in the vineyard is kept in a separate tank, maintaining the unique features of its individual *terroir.* This first fermentation takes two weeks.

Tasting and classifying comes next. Every morning from January to May, the Cellar Director and his team of oenologists assess the new wines for color, taste, and aroma. Blending follows, as artful decisions about creating the optimal *cuvée* are made. The choice will result in a wine that fully represents the Louis Roederer House style, while showcasing the richness and the elegance of the *terroir.* A precise palate and a House expertise handed down through generations are the essential prerequisites of this art.

Once blended, the wines are bottled in small quantities. Laid on their sides, the bottles of wine undergo a second fermentation. Here the effervescence that is the mark of Champagne develops, as the natural yeast interacts with sugar. The wines will remain here—"on the lees"—for at least three years. Louis Roederer attaches enormous importance to aging on the lees; its Champagnes undergo one of the longest maturations practiced in Champagne production.

TIME TO CELEBRATE

Time continues to be kind to Champagne. Certain vintages of Louis Roederer reach their prime many years after release. At your next celebration—whether it's a quiet dinner for two or a luxurious gala—raise a glass of Louis Roederer and toast the artistry of Champagne.

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WINTER PREVIEW INSIDE

"The New Electric Ballroom," at St. Ann's Warehouse. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
22	23	24	18	19	20	21

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DEEP SOUTH

New York Theatre Workshop presents "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," adapted by Rebecca Gilman from Carson McCullers's 1940 novel. Doug Hughes directs the drama, in which an itinerant deaf loner ends up in a Georgia mill town during the Depression. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
CHOIRBOY

The Kinks' front man, Ray Davies, might not be able to swing a reunion of his old band, but he has returned to its back catalogue in spectacular fashion. A London-based, sixty-five-member chorus joined him on his latest record, "The Kinks Choral Collection," and he's at Town Hall with New York's Dessoff Chamber Choir, forty strong. (See page 16.)

ART
HORSE SENSE

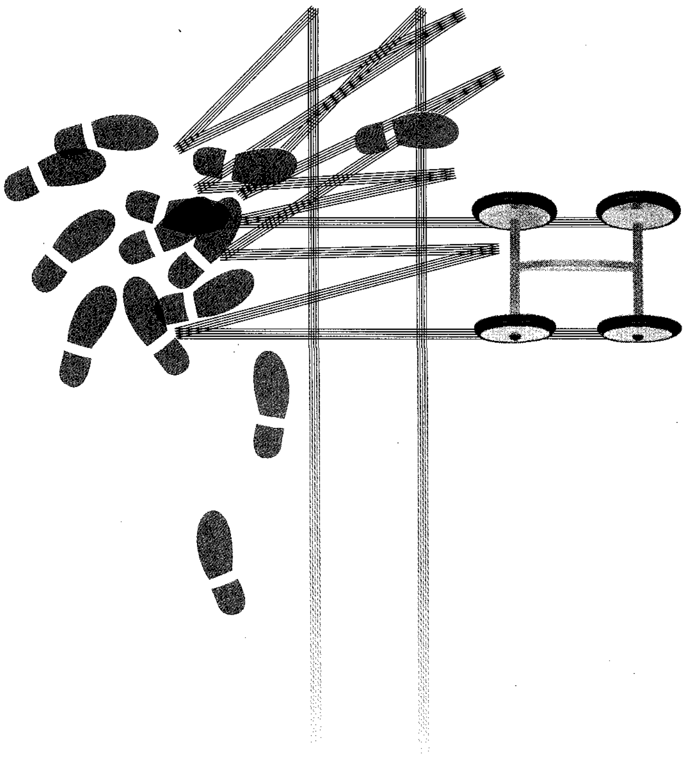
On Nov. 21, the Smithsonian curator and beadworker Emil Her Many Horses, an Oglala Lakota, will give a tour of the exhibition "A Song for the Horse Nation," at the National Museum of the American Indian. From 1 to 4:30, Native American artists will demonstrate traditional arts, including horsehair basket weaving, doll-making, and quillwork. (See page 22.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PURLOINED PROSE

Claude Debussy was fascinated by the dark world of Edgar Allan Poe. To commemorate the bicentennial of Poe's birth, Opéra Français de New York offers performances of music from Debussy's abandoned Metropolitan Opera commission—a double bill of "The Devil in the Belfry" and "The Fall of the House of Usher." (See page 28.)

MOVIES
OUTSIDE IN

As it becomes harder for independent films to get theatrical releases, MOMA's annual series "Best Film Not Playing at a Theater Near You" takes on more importance. This year's picks include Tariq Tapa's "Zero Bridge," set in Kashmir, and Damien Chazelle's musical, "Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench." (See page 34.)



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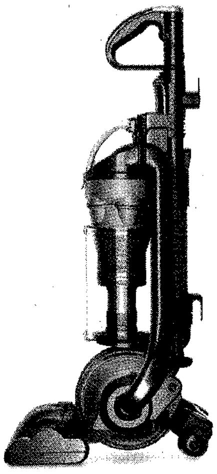


THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE AGE OF IRON
To kick off the Classic Stage Company season, Brian Kulick adapts and directs a mashup of Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and Thomas Heywood's "Iron Age." In previews. Opens Nov. 22. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

BRITS OFF BROADWAY
The annual festival includes Matt Wilkinson's "Red Sea Fish," directed by Franklyn McCabe; "Wolves at the Window," by Toby Davies, directed by Thomas Hescott; and, opening Nov. 18, "My Wonderful Day," written and directed by Alan Ayckbourn. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CIRCUMCISE ME
Yisrael Campbell wrote and stars in this autobiographical one-man comedy, about his life as an Irish-Italian Catholic man who converted to Judaism. Opens Nov. 18. (Theatres at 45 Bleecker Street, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

DREAMGIRLS
The Apollo Theatre is the first stop on a national tour of this revival of the 1981 musical, about the rise of an all-girl singing group from Chicago in the sixties. With music by Henry Krieger and a book and lyrics by Tom Eyen; Robert Longbottom choreographs and directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 22. (253 W. 125th St. 212-307-4100.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the activist musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones; music performed onstage by members of Antibalas. In previews. Opens Nov. 23. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

GIRL CRAZY
The "Encores!" season opens with George and Ira Gershwin's 1930 musical, with a book by Guy Bolton and Jack McGowan. Ana Gasteyer, Wayne Knight, and Marc Kudisch star; Jerry Zaks directs. Nov. 19-22. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE GREAT RECESSION
The Flea presents ten-minute plays by Thomas Bradshaw, Sheila Callaghan, Erin Courtney, Will Eno, Itamar Moses, and Adam Rapp. Previews begin Nov. 20. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER
Rebecca Gilman wrote this play, based on the novel by Carson McCullers, in which an itinerant deaf loner ends up in a small Southern town during the Depression. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY
Les Waters directs Sarah Ruhl's Broadway début, a comedy about marriage, starring Laura Benanti and Michael Cerveris. In previews. Opens Nov. 19. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
Catherine Zeta-Jones, Angela Lansbury, and Alexander Hanson star in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical, based on Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night," a romantic comedy revolving around the affairs of an actress at a Swedish country house. Trevor Nunn directs. Previews begin Nov. 24. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART I
Hallie Foote leads the ensemble performing Horton Foote's play cycle, comprising nine works shown in three parts, produced by Signature Theatre Company and Hartford Stage. Michael Wilson directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 19. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

POST NO BILLS
The Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre presents a new drama by Mando Alvarado, about an aspiring singer-songwriter who moves to a big city and becomes involved with a pair of street musicians. In previews. Opens Nov. 19. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

RACE
David Mamet directs the world première of his new play, starring James Spader, David Alan Grier, Kerry Washington, and Richard Thomas. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROBIN WILLIAMS: WEAPONS OF SELF-DESTRUCTION
The comedian performs his latest standup show. Opens Nov. 23. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100.)

SO HELP ME GOD!
Mint Theatre Company presents a revival of Maurine Dallas Watkins's 1929 play, in which a diva actress is threatened by her understudy. Kristen Johnston and Anna Chlumsky star; Jonathan Bank directs. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER
Kenneth Lonergan wrote and directs this drama for the New Group, starring Matthew Broderick as a planetarium lecturer and Catalina Sandino Moreno ("Maria Full of Grace") as the single mother he falls in love with. In previews. Opens Nov. 23. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THIS
Julianne Nicholson stars in a new play by Melissa James Gibson, about a widowed failed poet entering her forties who is raising a ten-year-old daughter and starting to date. Directed by Daniel Aukin. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ZERO HOUR
Jim Brochu wrote and stars in this play, about the life of Zero Mostel. Piper Laurie directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 22. (Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

WINTER THEATRE PREVIEW

MOVIE-STAR WATTAGE
Empirical evidence is mounting for the case that you can't have a Broadway show these days without a marquee name attached. Scarlett Johansson, in her Broadway début, and Liev Schreiber star in Arthur Miller's 1955 classic, "A View from the Bridge," directed by Gregory Mosher, at the Cort (previews begin Dec. 28). ♦ At the American Airlines Theatre, Victor Garber stars in Noël Coward's 1939 farce, "Present Laughter" (Jan. 2), as an actor who suffers constant interruptions as he prepares for a trip to Africa. Nicholas Martin directs, for the Roundabout. ♦ Donald Margulies premières "Time Stands Still," about war journalists whose injuries force them to curtail their adventures. Laura Linney, Alicia Silverstone, Eric Bogosian, and Brian d'Arcy James star in the Manhattan Theatre Club production, directed by Daniel Sullivan at the Samuel J. Friedman (Jan. 5). ♦ Abigail Breslin plays Helen Keller opposite Alison Pill's Annie Sullivan in a revival of William Gibson's 1959 drama, "The Miracle Worker," directed by Kate Whoriskey at Circle in the Square (Feb. 12). ♦ Julie Taymor's "Spider-Man Turn Off the Dark," which features music by U2's Bono and the Edge and has been dogged by rumors of scheduling and financial problems, stars Evan Rachel Wood, Reeve Carney, and Alan Cumming, at the Hilton (Feb. 25).

THE OFF SEASON
Beyond Times Square, Off Broadway is no stranger to the star turn. Cate Blanchett headlines Tennessee Williams's "Streetcar Named Desire," in a Sydney Theatre Company production directed by Liv Ullmann, at BAM (Nov. 27). ♦ Also at BAM, Sam Mendes directs his touring Bridge Project productions of Shakespeare's "As You Like It" (Jan. 12) and "The Tempest" (Feb. 14). ♦ John Lithgow and Jennifer Ehle star in the première of Douglas Carter Beane's comedy "Mr. & Mrs. Fitch," about a pair of married gossip columnists, at Second Stage (Jan. 26). ♦ Ethan Hawke directs Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind," starring Alessandro Nivola, Marin Ireland, Josh Hamilton, and Frank Whaley, for the New Group at the Acorn (late January). ♦ Hugh Dancy and Ben Whishaw star in Alexi Kaye Campbell's "The Pride," directed by Joe Mantello, at the Lucille Lortel (Jan. 27). ♦ David Cromer directs "When the Rain Stops Falling," a drama by Andrew Bovell, at the Mitzi E. Newhouse (Feb. 11).

ALTERNATIVE VIEW
January is the time to check out what's happening in the downtown scene, with several showcases of experimental and up-and-coming artists: "The Best of Edinburgh" (Jan. 4-31), at the Flea; the Public's "Under the Radar" (Jan. 6-17); and HERE Arts Center's "Culturemart" (Jan. 12-30).

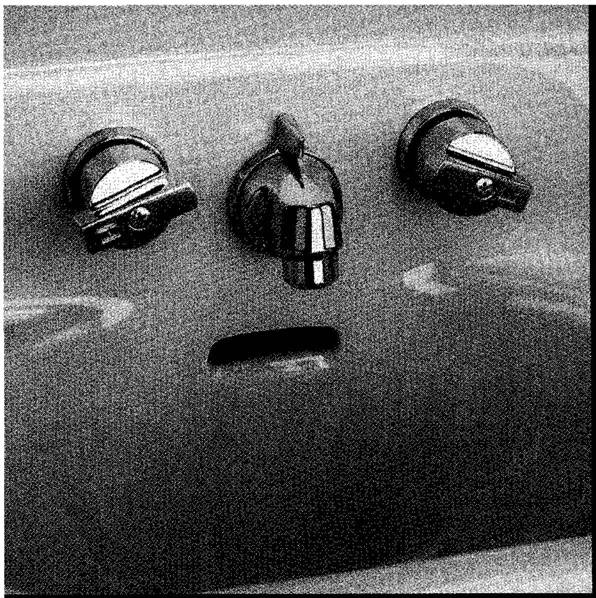
NOW PLAYING

THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS
Tarell Alvin McCraney premières a trilogy of stories centered on an extended family living in the bayou. Produced in association with the McCarter Theatre. Tina Landau directs "Part 1: In the Red and Brown Water"; Robert O'Hara directs "Part 2: The Brothers Size" and "Marcus; or The Secret of Sweet." (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

IDIOT SAVANT
This elegiac and beautiful new play, by the writer and director Richard Foreman, is a kind of journey through consciousness. Three Servants, standing as stiff as boards, sometimes aim bows and arrows at the title character's head; they are his superego, the self-conscious meanies who want to control the Idiot Savant (Willem Dafoe, in a great, expansive performance) and steer him away from his obsession with the only thing he can do: talk and think about language. A woman named Marie (the astonishing Alenka Kraigher) plays a kind of dominatrix-as-marionette; in Foreman's world, the female characters are often the provocateurs. Kraigher is perfectly cast, and unforgettable, because she doesn't give in to his ideas completely—or to the Idiot Savant's. She provides the necessary resistance that makes this comedic drama just that. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/16/09.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN
Sidney Howard's 1932 comedy, which has been unjustly gathering dust, gets a first-rate outing by the Actors Company Theatre. Dr. Haggett (the terrific James Murtaugh), a country physician living outside of Boston, becomes the sudden focus of the art-world élite when he turns out to be the unknowing owner of a stash of priceless paintings. As collectors and scammers gather at his doorstep, his simple life is upended and his family descends into a collective frenzy of greed. (Cynthia Darlow, a company veteran, is particularly scrumptious as the devil-eyed matriarch.) The relevance of Depression-era avarice is not the only reason to revive the play: Jenn Thompson's production proves it to be a gem in any era, and catnip for a comedic ensemble. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

LASSE SKARBOVIK



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THE MISUNDERSTANDING
Albert Camus's 1943 play concerns Jan (Rafael De Mussa), who returns home after a long absence to the inn run by his mother (Ellen Crawford) and his sister, Martha (Wendy Allegaert). Jan expects to be received as a prodigal son; instead, they don't recognize him and treat him as a stranger. He withholds his identity, thereby sealing his own fate: mother and daughter survive in their desolate village by murdering the occasional wealthy guest. Allegaert is compelling and even, at times, sympathetic as a deprived woman who longs only to live by the sea, where the sun can burn away her soul; Crawford is excellent, bringing to the role a languid exhaustion both physical and spiritual. As a whole, however, Horizon Theatre Rep's black-box production, directed by Alex Lippard, lacks vigor, often getting bogged down beneath the weight of the words. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 22.)

OR,
Liz Duffy Adams's farce, produced by Women's Project, begins in England in the early seventeenth century, when Charles II (Andy Paris), a relentlessly frisky king, visits Aphra Behn (Maggie Siff, of "Mad Men"), an alluring and confident spy, in debtor's prison. The king wants to free Behn so she can become his lover, but Behn (who's based on the historical figure) has her eye on more important things: to find fame as a playwright and to make love to a famous actress (Kelly Hutchinson). The tissue-thin, self-conscious plot feels like an excuse to have Paris and Hutchinson play multiple characters. The shenanigans are funny at first, but when they get old, the play feels empty. Zane Pihlstrom's beautiful set brings together the sixteen-sixties and the nineteen-sixties, driving home the point that those eras had a certain relaxed morality in common. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Through Nov. 22.)

PETER AND THE WOLF
Brian Blessed narrates Prokofiev's 1936 masterpiece, performed with a new prequel composition by Philip Feeney. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

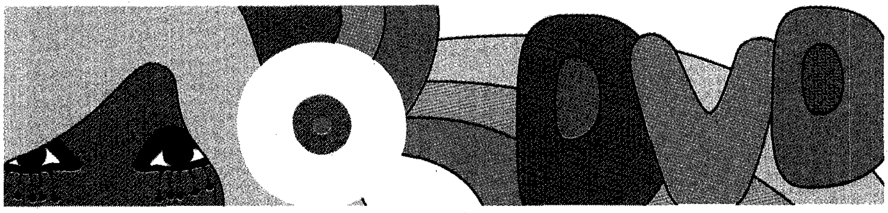
RAGTIME
Marcia Milgrom Dodge directs and choreographs the 1998 musical, based on the book by E. L. Doctorow. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.)

THE UNDERSTUDY
Kafka on Broadway, complete with Hollywood stars and expensive scenery for them to chew, provides the perfect comic setup in Theresa Rebeck's new play. This is the understudy rehearsal, in which a cocky action hero (Mark-Paul Gosselaar) is learning the lead role alongside an unknown (Justin Kirk) who disdains him; a harried stage manager (Julie White) shepherds them through the process. Though the play is undermined by a few flaws, Rebeck's script and the three actors are terrific when the play hits its stride, delivering a clever indictment of contemporary theatre while making the characters' personal circumstances ever more Kafkaesque: they are no more in control of the forces of celebrity, art, money, and Broadway than they are of their own fates. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WHAT ONCE WE FELT
LCT3, the "emerging artist" wing of Lincoln Center Theatre, presents the world première of Ann Marie Healy's sorely undercooked new play set in an unspecified future, in which there are no men, children are conceived through the digestion of mail-order pills, and advances in genetic mapping have led to the tense divvying up of society between the privileged Keepers and the systematically suppressed Tradepacks. Unfortunately, Healy's explanation of the basic hows and whys of this ambitiously imagined dystopia stop there. The audience is left to guess how things got to be the way they are, the effect of which is more frustrating than tantalizing, which seems to be Healy's (misguided) aim. Her own fascination with language eclipses the drama, and the shaky cast, directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, seems more concerned with the delivery of jokes than with putting across the story. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through Nov. 21.)

Also Playing

AFTER MISS JULIE: American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **AVENUE Q:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BROKE-OLOGY:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Through Nov. 22. **BYE BYE BIRDIE:** Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **CREATURE:** Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 866-811-4111. Through Nov. 21. **THE EMPEROR JONES:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **FINIAN'S RAINBOW:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAMLET:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **LET ME DOWN EASY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **THE LILY'S REVENGE:** HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 22. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MEMPHIS:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NEW ELECTRIC BALLROOM:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Nov. 22. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NIGHTINGALE:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **ORDINARY DAYS:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **A STEADY RAIN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **VIGIL:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.



DVD NOTES
L.A. STATES OF MIND

Kent Mackenzie's independent film "The Exiles," which was completed in 1961, was revealed at the time of its long-delayed theatrical release last year to be one of the glories and wonders of the American cinema. The extra material in Milestone's two-disk set offers a welcome chance to put it into context.

The story distills one night in the lives of a group of young Native Americans living in Bunker Hill, a poor but picturesque Los Angeles neighborhood. Yvonne (Yvonne Williams) is pregnant and living with her husband, Homer (Homer Nish), a layabout and a gambler, who drops her off at a movie theatre and forgets her there while he goes off to carouse with friends. Tommy (Tommy Reynolds), a brazen playboy, picks up a woman at a bar and drinks himself into trouble. The action—which begins with Yvonne wandering through a vast food market—is captured in black-and-white images that are richly textured with the sights and nuances of daily life, all the while maintaining a poised, classical grandeur. (A shot of a woman in a convertible whose cigarette sparks in the night wind became an immediate icon.) As much an impressionistic gallery of urban landscapes as a set of intimate portraits, the film burrows deep into its characters' psyches through the use of first-person voice-overs by its trio of main characters.

As the names of its performers suggest, Mackenzie worked with non-actors and developed his characters and his story with actual residents of Bunker Hill. The second disk includes a facsimile of Mackenzie's extraordinary U.S.C. master's thesis, from 1964, in which he recounts and analyzes the production of the film. It's one of the greatest works ever written on the subject of filmmaking, and deserves to be released on its own as a book. There, Mackenzie explains the lengthy preparatory work that went into the research and the composition of the film, which, for all its on-location liveliness and improvised dialogue, its unpaid crew and scrounged equipment, and the remarkably long and turbulent shoot (which included the incarceration of several cast members and the liberal consumption of alcohol), was as carefully prepared as a Hollywood feature. Mackenzie gets to the heart of his methods—and of the cinema itself—in his musings about the difference between filming "real" things and "inner qualities."

—*Richard Brody*

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (347-422-0248)—Nov. 24: **Jenny Scheinman** is a violinist and composer who has tackled jazz, country, and deeply textured pop. **Robbie Fulks** is a "hillbilly brainiac" (in Scheinman's words) mining the satiric-country genre. Together, they're delightfully complementary, sharing each other's compositions and mixing in some fiddle tunes. They've also been writing music based on Flannery O'Connor stories, presumably because their regular material just isn't weird enough.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 23: The Japanese band **Melt Banana** is so fast and noisy that it sounds like an anime episode sped up to triple time. Yasuko Onuki's accelerated vocal chirping is actually in English, but you'd have to consult the liner notes for proof.

BROOKLYN MASONIC TEMPLE
317 Clermont Ave. (866-468-7619)—The Memphis-bred power-pop visionaries and cult favorites **Big Star** have a fractious history. After their début album, "#1 Record," came out, in 1972, the founding guitarist, Chris Bell, quit the band. The lead singer, Alex Chilton, formerly of the Box Tops, kept the group going for a few more years, but after Bell died, in a car wreck in 1978, it seemed certain that they would never release another record.

KARI MODEN

THE RITUAL

✱

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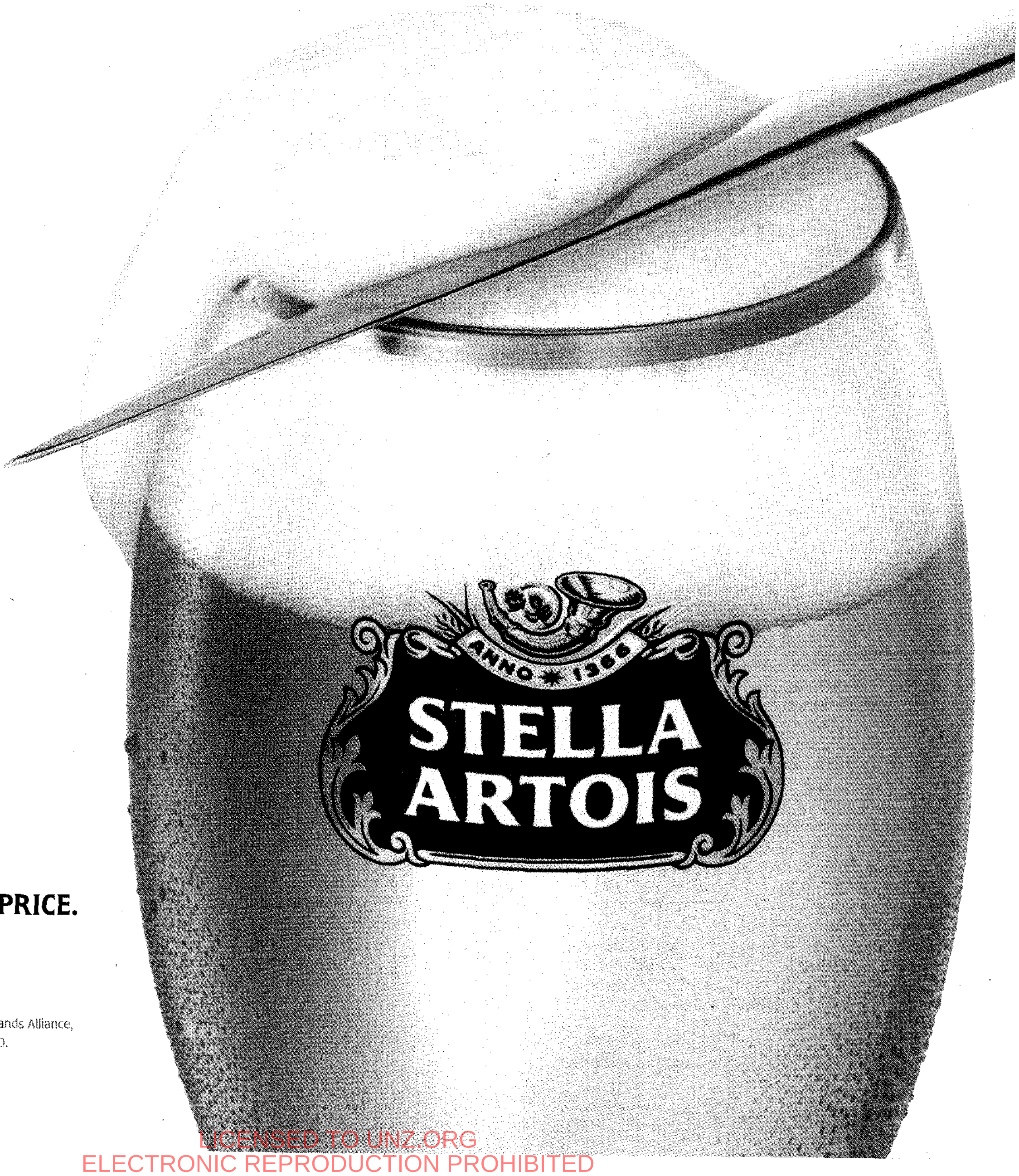

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But in 1993 Chilton and the original drummer, Jody Stephens, brought the band back together, adding the Posies' Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow, and in 2005 they cut "In Space." This version of the group has sporadically appeared live. They are here Nov. 18 in support of a retrospective four-disk boxed set, "Keep an Eye on the Sky."

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 20-21: Revered for their quirky wit, subversive tendencies, and skewed, high-concept pop, the iconoclastic Ohio quintet **Devo** became unlikely New Wave stars in 1980 via their single "Whip It." The prolific band kept at it, but the hits gradually dried up, and they plunged into an inactive period for much of the nineties. Following a series of reunion shows over the last few years, Devo recently reëntered the studio to record their first new album in nearly two decades. To prime the pump, two of their biggest albums are being rereleased (1978's "Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!" and 1980's "Freedom of Choice"), and each will be played in its entirety during the band's current tour.

KNITTING FACTORY
361 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-529-6696)—Nov. 18: The indie heroes **Papa M** (a.k.a. David Pajo, the founder of the now defunct band Slint) and **Rain Machine** (the experimental side project of TV on the Radio's Kyp Malone) provide the music for a party celebrating the theatrical release of "Until the Light Takes Us," a no-holds-barred documentary about the violent Norwegian black-metal community of the mid-nineties. Nov. 21: **Jad Fair,** the remarkably unskilled guitarist for the lo-fi rock band Half Japanese, is best known for his collaborations with artists such as Daniel Johnston, Yo La Tengo, John Zorn, Teenage Fanclub, and Thurston Moore. His solo work is strange, but it is strange in a very listenable way. His songs are spoken rather than sung and are backed up by bizarre, indiscernible sounds that resemble the whimpering of cartoon animals. He is also a visual artist whose bright paper cutouts and line drawings match the simplicity and charm of his music.

MONSTER ISLAND BASEMENT
128 River St., at Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (No phone)—Nov. 18: **Javelin.** This pair of cousins, recent transplants from Providence, Rhode Island, have an interesting take on audience participation. In addition to stacking or hanging colorful boom boxes in front of their setup, they broadcast a live, short-range FM signal of their performance and encourage audience members to bring their own radios, resulting in a battery-powered electro-pop dance party. It's a communal experience that works perfectly with their silky and eccentric R. & B.-influenced sound.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Nov. 24-25: The noise-rock pioneers **Sonic Youth** aren't getting any younger, but they're not fading away, either. The founding members, Thurston Moore, Kim Gordon, and Lee Ranaldo, are in their fifties, but the band remains connected to contemporary culture. They tour, release new material, and make pop-culture appearances, like their cameo on "Gossip Girl" last month, a television series that Gordon and her husband, Moore, are big fans of. The opening act on Nov. 24 is Brooklyn's clamorous **Talk Normal.** On Nov. 25, the fabulous **Jemina Pearl,** formerly of Nashville's punky Be Your Own Pet, has the warmup duties.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Nov. 18: The **Cranberries** crept out of Limerick, Ireland, in the late eighties, playing liltingly delicate, confessional pop laced with windswept melancholy. As the years passed and their albums progressed, the band evolved into seasoned hit-makers, spawning several chart singles and eye-catching videos. After their rigorous rise to fame, the group went on hiatus earlier this decade. Reconvening for the first time in a half-dozen years, the Cranberries will be performing their greatest hits, along with songs from "No Baggage," the recent solo album from the lead singer, Dolores O'Riordan.

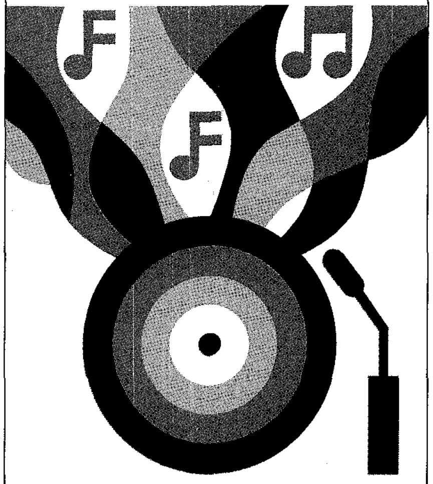
SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Nov. 20: The **Reigning Sound,** a rollicking garage band from Tennessee, plays furious, blues-laced guitar rock that is as soulful as it is hard-hitting. At its best, the band—led by the songwriter Greg Cartwright—balances the ferocious bluster of punk rock against the heartfelt punch of classic R. & B.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Nov. 25: **Sonic Youth** (see the Music Hall of Williamsburg). The opening acts are the noisy, melodic rockers of **Dinosaur Jr.** and Philadelphia's catchy synth-pop outfit **Cold Cave.**

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-307-4100)—**Ray Davies** recently reimagined some of his classic Kinks songs with the help of a sixty-five-voice choir, the Crouch End Festival Chorus, from his Muswell Hill section of London, and recorded "The Kinks Choral Collection." The material (including "Waterloo Sunset," "Days," and "Shangri-La") is impeccable, the results are lovely, and Ray himself is one of rock's most delightful performers. On Nov. 19-20, he'll be joined by New York's **Dessoff Chamber Choir,** forty voices rich. But here's the question: exactly how many voices does it take to replace Dave, his brother and Kinks-co-founder? Nov. 22. The endearing oddball **Devendra Banhart** is the bearded poster child for the contemporary freak-folk movement. With sounds ranging from psychedelic folk to Motown, his newest release, "What Will We Be," reflects the entire sixties musical spectrum.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 21: Following the official and evidently acrimonious dissolution of the iconic alternative band New Order, in 2007, the vocalist and guitarist Bernard Sumner wasted little time in assembling a new outfit. Taking its name from the gritty Abel Ferrara film, **Bad Lieutenant** mines similar territory, and executes the material with a more passionate approach, as if to cast a darker penumbra than the looming shadow of Sumner's former band. Nov. 21 in the downstairs Studio space: The **Bloodsugars'** new album, "I Can't Go On, I'll Go On," is what its front man, Jason Rabinowitz, calls "a modern prom playlist." No matter how low your blood sugar—Rabinowitz himself is a diabetic, hence the band's name—when you hear these songs, you'll go on, and find yourself in the mood to dance. The irresistible beats and catchy hooks of this tight synth-pop quartet would enhance any party. Also playing this CD-release show are **Project Jenny Project Jan,** a lap-top band that turns out dynamic indie dance compositions, and **Savoir Adore,** a syrupy boy-girl duo whose music sparkles like a post-rock fairy tale.

WINTER NIGHT LIFE PREVIEW


LASSE SKARBÖVIK

SEASONAL SHOWS
Arlo Guthrie makes his annual pilgrimage to Carnegie Hall on Nov. 28 to revisit the Thanksgiving misadventures of his youth. He'll be joined by his children and grandchildren. (212-247-7800.) ♦ The "101.9 RXP Presents Matt Pinfield's Holiday Extravaganza," at the Hammerstein Ballroom on Dec. 2, features Jack's Mannequin, Manchester Orchestra, Passion Pit, and Phoenix. (800-745-3000.) ♦ Taylor Swift, John Mayer, and a slew of other pop stars descend on Madison Square Garden for Z-100's "Jingle Ball," on Dec. 11. (800-745-3000.)

GREAT RETURNS
Phish, the erstwhile kings of jam-band nation, reunited last summer after a four-year break. One of the greatest shows of the group's history was their 1995 New Year's Eve concert at Madison Square Garden. They hit the arena again Dec. 2-4. (800-745-3000.) ♦ Thirty years after "Chuck E's in Love" put her on the pop map, Rickie Lee Jones has a new album, "Balm in Gilead," that hooks her up with the likes of Ben Harper and Vic Chesnutt. On Dec. 7, she makes her first appearance at Carnegie Hall in nearly three decades. (212-247-7800.) ♦ Chris Brown attempts to salvage his reputation with a new album, "Graffiti," on Dec. 15. ♦ The indie-rock darlings Spoon release their seventh album, "Transference," at the end of January. ♦ The free-thinking troubadour Dev Hynes, who records and performs as Lightspeed Champion, releases his sophomore album, "Life Is Sweet! Nice to Meet You," on Feb. 16.

WORLD AND JAZZ SOUNDS
GlobalFEST fills Webster Hall on Jan. 10 with performers from around the globe, including the Senegalese group Meta and the Cornerstones and the Romanian Gypsy rockers Nightlosers. (212-545-7536.) ♦ Bill Frisell, Paul Motian, and Ron Carter, one of the premier small groups of the jazz world, play the Blue Note Feb. 23-28. (212-475-8592.)

BOXED SETS
Holidays mean big releases in big packages. "Do What You Want: Be What You Are. The Music of Daryl Hall & John Oates" traces the blue-eyed soul singers from their tender Philadelphia roots to their chart-topping days in New York and California. ♦ "Def Jam: 25th Anniversary Collection" tracks the hip-hop label from its birth in an N.Y.U dorm to its rise to worldwide domination; the five-disk set, which comes in a miniature milk crate, includes material from the Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, Jay-Z, and Ludacris. ♦ Miles Davis gets even more deluxe treatment with "The Complete Columbia Album Collection," a seventy-one-disk set that covers more than thirty years of his output, available only on Amazon.com.

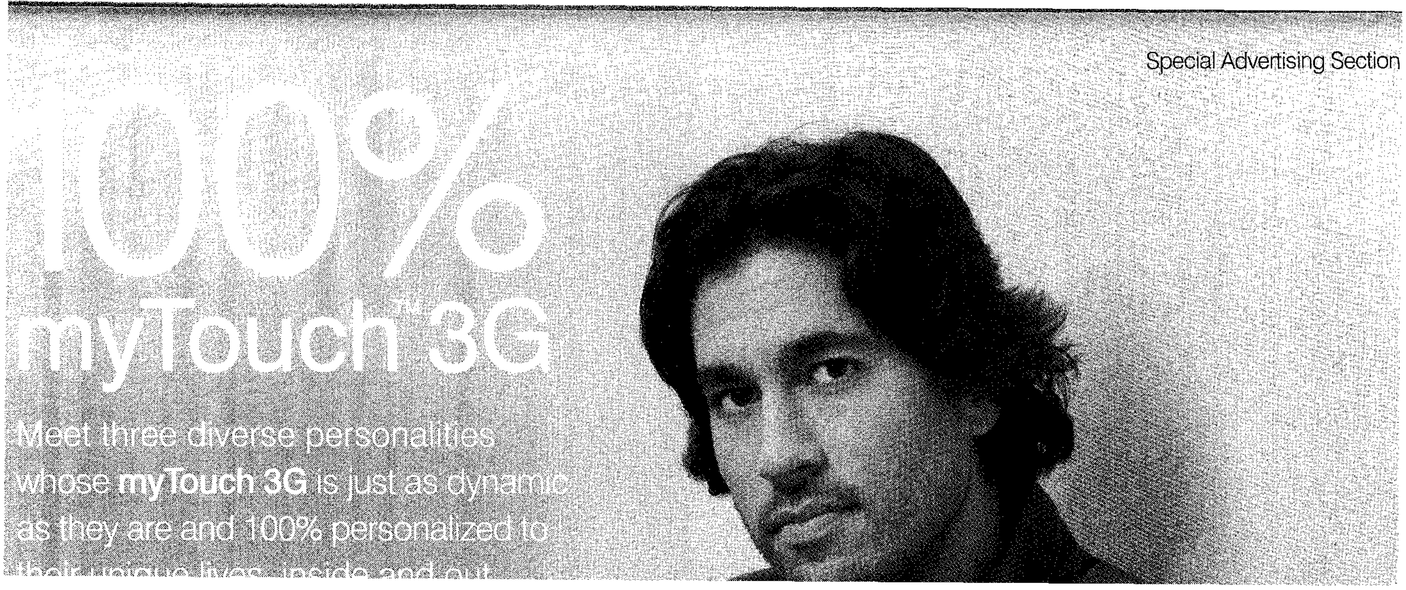
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting Nov. 17: The Oak Room mainstay **Andrea Marcovicci** salutes the immortal songwriter Johnny Mercer.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 17-21: **Nicholas Payton** is a member of a continually evolving, fecund generation of trumpeters that includes Roy Hargrove and Marcus Printup. Having delved into everything from traditional New Orleans jazz to neo-R. & B., Payton is a hard-blowing crowd-pleaser.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 17-22: **Savion Glover,** the world-class tap dancer, regularly transforms rhythm into high art. Glover brings his prodigious gifts to encounters with jazz luminaries including the pianists **McCoy Tyner** (Nov. 17) and **Eddie Palmieri** (Nov. 19) and the drummers **Roy Haynes** (Nov. 18) and **Jack DeJohnette** (Nov. 21-22).

CARNEGIE HALL
Seventh Ave. at 57th St. (212-247-7800)—Nov. 20: Johnny Mercer, the wordsmith behind "Moon River," "Come Rain or Come Shine," "Accentuate the Positive," and other classics, gets a centenary salute from the **New York Pops** and **Ann Hampton Callaway, James T. Lane, N'Kenge,** and other vocalists.



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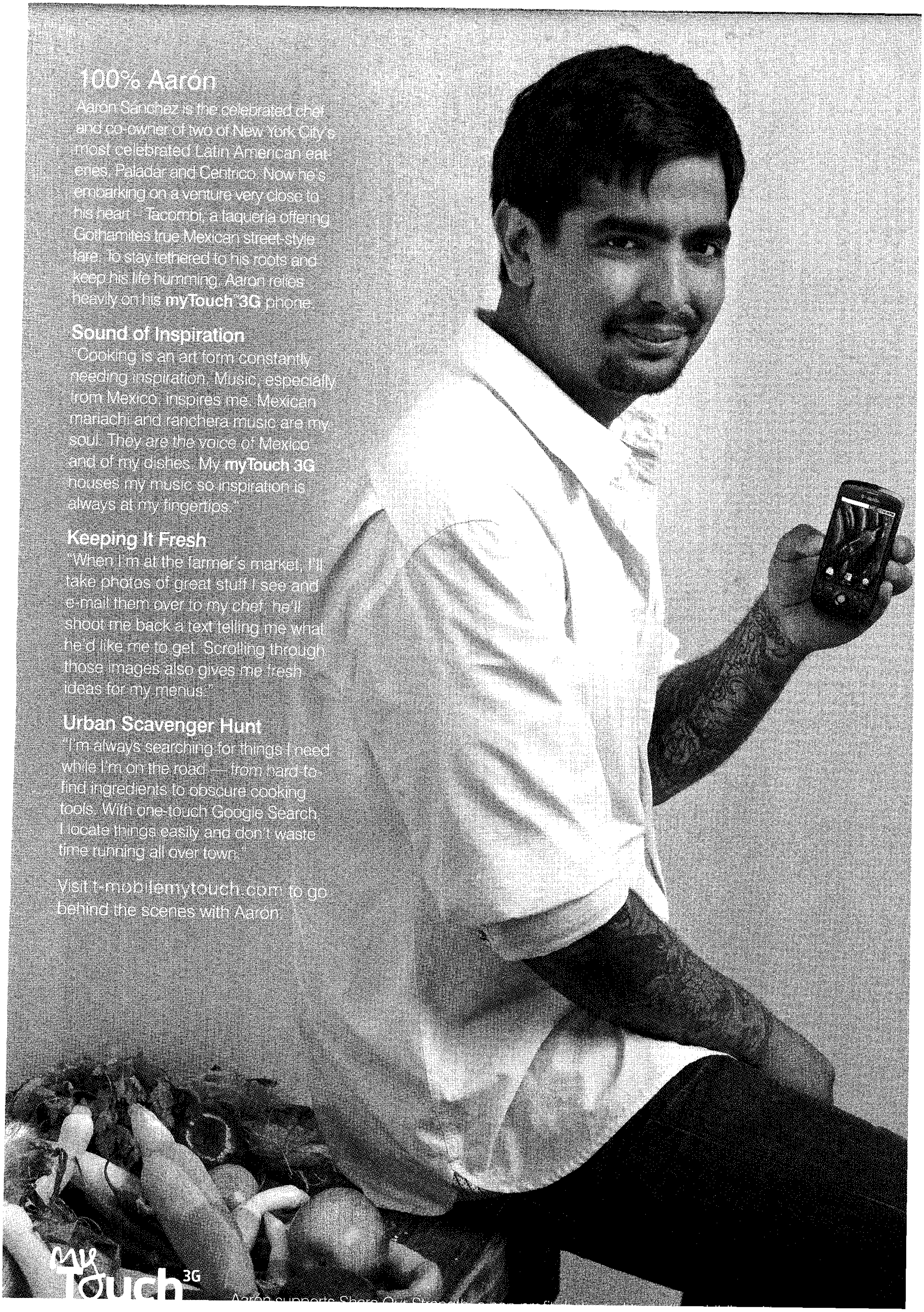

100% Aarón

Aarón Sanchez is the celebrated chef and co-owner of two of New York City's most celebrated Latin American eateries, Paladar and Centrico. Now he's embarking on a venture very close to his heart – Tacombi, a taqueria offering Gothamites true Mexican street-style fare. To stay tethered to his roots and keep his life humming, Aaron relies heavily on his **myTouch™ 3G** phone.

Sound of Inspiration

"Cooking is an art form constantly needing inspiration. Music, especially from Mexico, inspires me. Mexican mariachi and ranchera music are my soul. They are the voice of Mexico and of my dishes. My **myTouch 3G** houses my music so inspiration is always at my fingertips."

Keeping It Fresh

"When I'm at the farmer's market, I'll take photos of great stuff I see and e-mail them over to my chef; he'll shoot me back a text telling me what he'd like me to get. Scrolling through those images also gives me fresh ideas for my menus."

Urban Scavenger Hunt

"I'm always searching for things I need while I'm on the road — from hard-to-find ingredients to obscure cooking tools. With one-touch Google Search, I locate things easily and don't waste time running all over town."

Visit t-mobilemytouch.com to go behind the scenes with Aarón.

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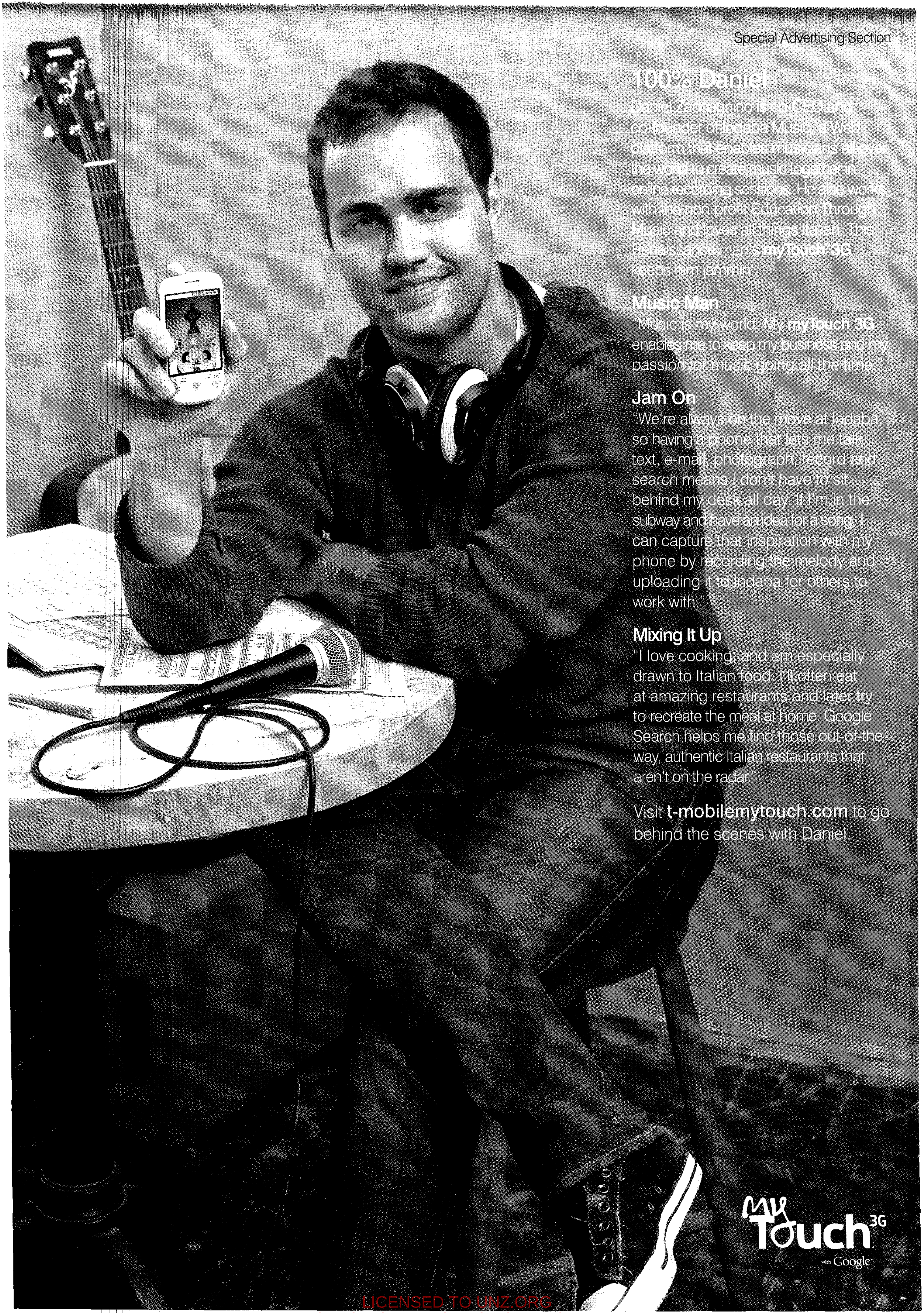

100% Daniel

Daniel Zaccagnino is co-CEO and co-founder of Indaba Music, a Web platform that enables musicians all over the world to create music together in online recording sessions. He also works with the non-profit Education Through Music and loves all things Italian. This Renaissance man's **myTouch® 3G** keeps him jammin'.

Music Man

"Music is my world. My **myTouch 3G** enables me to keep my business and my passion for music going all the time."

Jam On

"We're always on the move at Indaba, so having a phone that lets me talk, text, e-mail, photograph, record and search means I don't have to sit behind my desk all day. If I'm in the subway and have an idea for a song, I can capture that inspiration with my phone by recording the melody and uploading it to Indaba for others to work with."

Mixing It Up

"I love cooking, and am especially drawn to Italian food. I'll often eat at amazing restaurants and later try to recreate the meal at home. Google Search helps me find those out-of-the-way, authentic Italian restaurants that aren't on the radar."

Visit **t-mobilemytouch.com** to go behind the scenes with Daniel.

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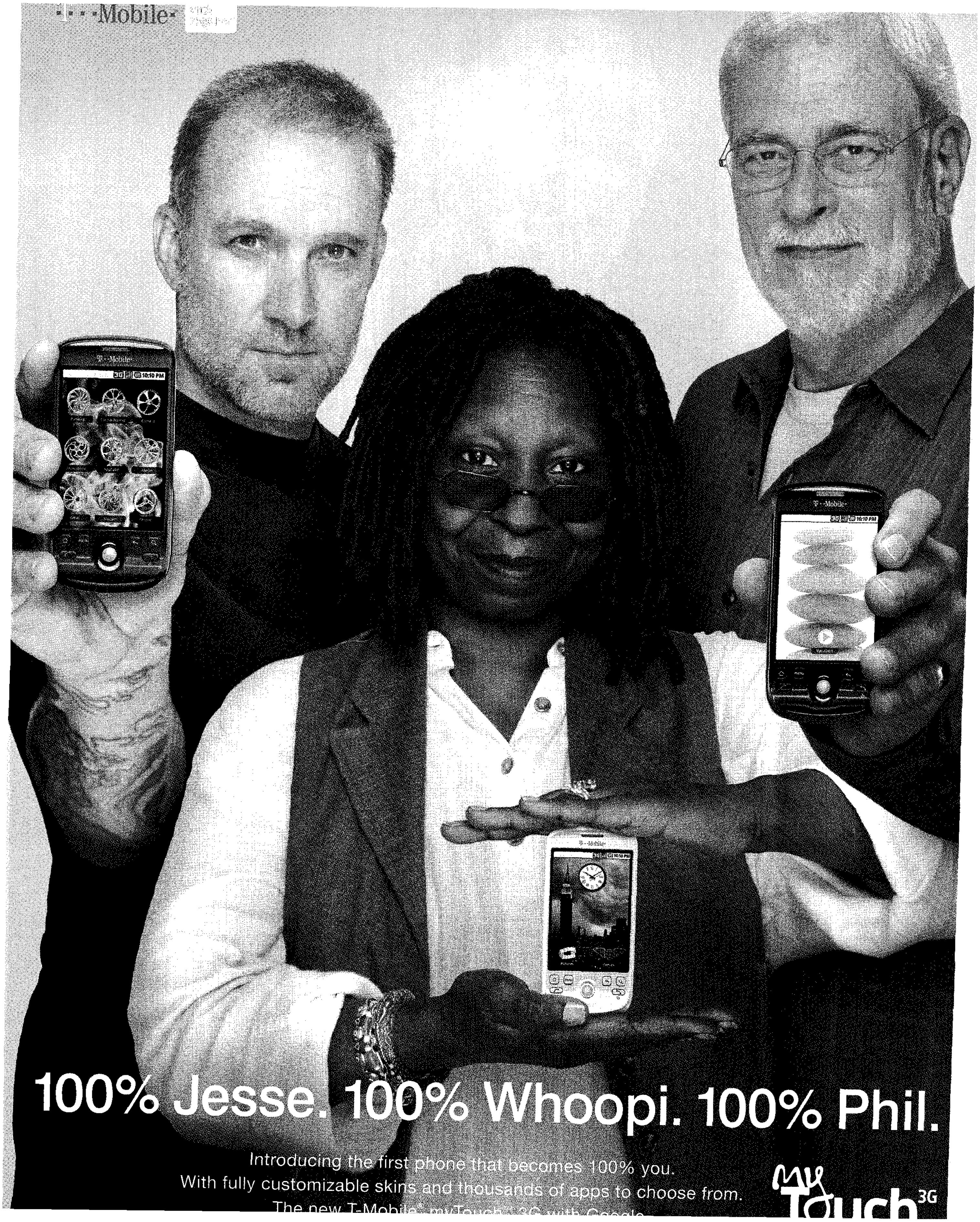

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DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 17-22: **George Wein & the Newport All Stars.** The jazz impresario and occasional pianist gets to indulge his musical passions with the support of such full-time players as the saxophonist **Lew Tabackin**, the trumpeter **Randy Sandke**, and the guitarist **Howard Alden**.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 18-22: The saxophonist **Pharoah Sanders** experiences the passing of time at first hand when he's joined by **Ravi Coltrane**, the son of the jazz deity who brought Sanders to initial fame in the mid-sixties.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 18: **Johnny's Dream Club** melds the Cuban roots of the guitarist and composer **Juan-Carlos Formell** with the New Orleans strains of the clarinettist **Dr. Michael White**. Nov. 19-22: If you only know the saxophonist **Steve Grossman** from his early-seventies association with Miles Davis, you don't know him at all. Fusion long behind him, Grossman is now a committed classicist with a meaty Sonny Rollins-like tone who likes nothing better than digging deep into a standard. He's got just the right neo-bop players behind him: **David Hazeltine** on piano, **John Webber** on bass, and **Jason Brown** on drums.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 17-22: The **Paul Motian Octet Plus 1.** The drummer Motian is a bandleader of extremes. His trios are bare-bones affairs that often do without a bassist; his larger groups burst with guitarists, bassists, and horn players. His octet here ups the ante with the addition of **Mat Maneri** on viola.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The 'Young Archer,' Attributed to Michelangelo."** Ongoing. ♦ **"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'"** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping (1733-1799)."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)— **"Tim Burton."** Opens Nov. 22. **"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Projects 91: Artur Zmijewski."** Through Feb. 1. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Paired, Gold: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Intervals: Kitty Kraus."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Through June 13. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Steve Wolfe on Paper."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets."** Opens Nov. 19. ♦ **"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

TABLES FOR TWO
QUINTO QUARTO

Quinto Quarto

JESSIE WENDER

14 Bedford St., at Downing St. (212-675-9080)—At Quinto Quarto, everything is taken as a sign of authenticity. There are tables full of Italian speakers; the manager sends off regular customers with a kiss on the cheek and "Buona sera!" If the lone woman in a party picks the table's bottle of wine, the waiter might remark, "It's just like in Sicily, the matriarch of the family chooses." The restaurant offers Roman cuisine, the philosophy of which it lays out on its Web site, somewhat enigmatically: "Even nowadays that Rome is a big city, and that we lost the view of fields and pastures, the Roman cuisine is keeping the simplicity in preparation and the very high quality of its products . . . From dish to dish, from exquisiteness to exquisiteness the Roman cuisine is a healthy cuisine, tasty, rich of creativity that escapes useless artifices."

Yet if appearances point mostly to excellence—particularly the atmospheric space, previously occupied by AOC Bedford, with its cozy brick and old-Italia artifacts—there are occasional unsettling portents. The waiter who disappears halfway through service. Dishes that suddenly become unavailable. The pizza-delivery guy who shows up with two large pepperoni pies for the staff. Perhaps it was fatigue—Friday night, nearly closing time—but the food appeared alarmingly slapdash. Salads, one of oranges and fennel, another of artichokes and rocket, were haphazardly dressed and insipid. ("They have to get some credit for being exactly as advertised," one diner remarked.) Pastas had a glimmer of promise, with rich flavors but uneven textures—the *bucatini all'amatriciana* was infused with pork flavor, from tough, chewy little pieces of meat. Hope grew with the entrées: a flavorful oven-baked chicken, with crispy potatoes; tender rabbit tinged with sage. The wine was delicious, the prices very reasonable, the dessert disappointing (a wan chocolate cake, an order of ricotta cheesecake M.I.A.). Back to the statement of purpose: "The 'Roman DOC' is as a joker in the everyday life as he is demanding and gourmet once he sits at the table: he wants to eat well and drink better and this attitude comes from the state of things. In fact his land offers more than anyone can desires in food." It's a puzzler. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $16-$19.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

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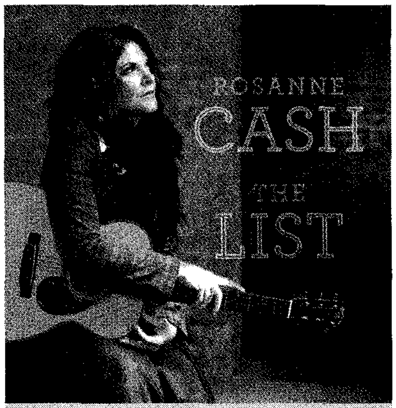

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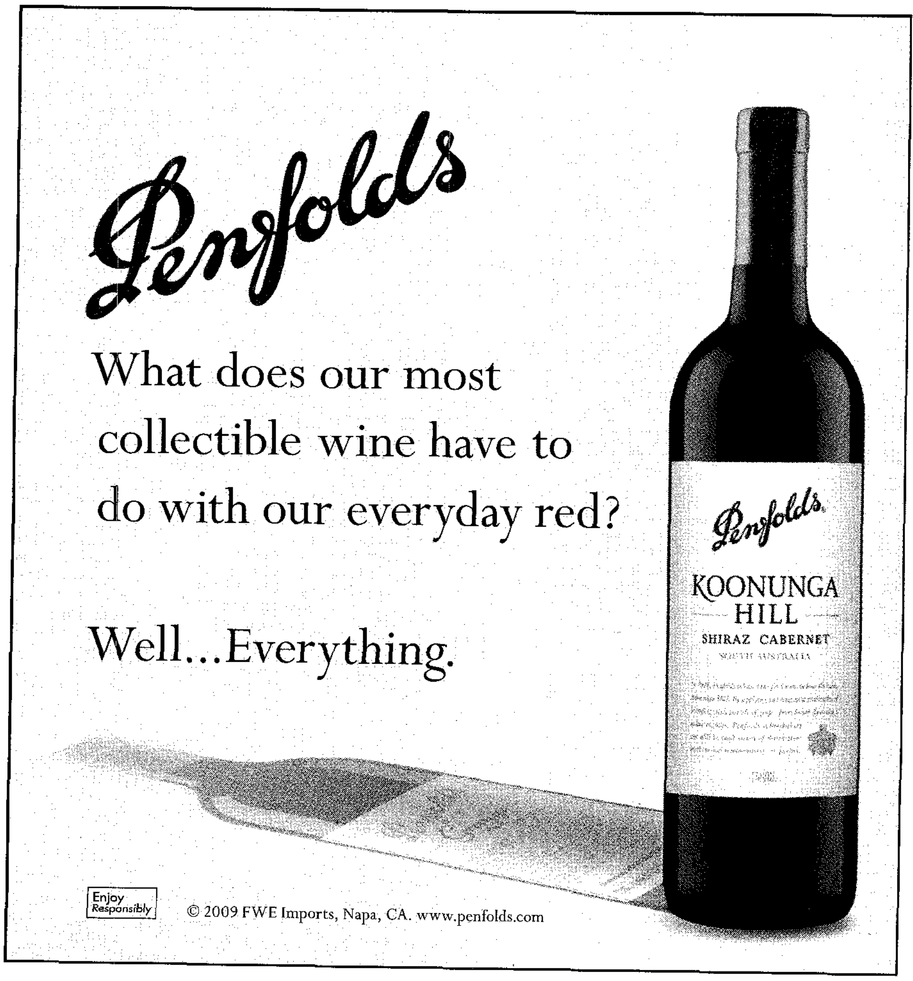
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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World." Through Aug. 15. ♦ "Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time." Through Jan. 3. ♦ "The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter." Through May 31. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—"Design USA: Contemporary Innovation." Through April 4. ♦ "Design for a Living World." Through Jan. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas." Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays, 1 to 4.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection." Through Jan. 10. ♦ "Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop." Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—"Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design." Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—"Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention." Through March 14. ♦ "Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life." Through Feb. 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy." Through March 14. ♦ "William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'" Through Jan. 3. ♦ "Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings." Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—"Voces y Visiones: Four Decades Through El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection." Through Feb. 28. ♦ "Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis." Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (212-514-3700)—"A Song for the Horse Nation." Through July 7. (Daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—"From Klimt to Klee: Masterworks from the Serge Sabarsky Collection." Through Feb. 15. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty." Through Feb. 7. ♦ "Nikhil Chopra: Yog Raj Chitrakar, Memory Drawing IX." Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—"Mapping New York's Shoreline, 1609-2009: Celebrating the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's Exploration of the Waterways of New York." Through June 26. ♦ "Candide at 250: Scandal and Success." Through April 25. (Mondays, 11 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays 1 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"1969."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Between Spaces."** Through April 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Duke Riley: Those About to Die Salute You."** Through March 13. ♦ **"O Zhang: Cutting the Blaze to New Frontiers."** Through March 13. ♦ **"Daniel Bozhkov: Republic of Perpetual Reconstitution and Rebuild."** Through March 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, noon to 5.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**"The Red Book of C. G. Jung."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"In Practice Fall 2009."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"30 Seconds off an Inch."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Wardell Milan: Drawings of Harlem."** Through March 14. ♦ **"A Delicate Touch: Watercolors from the Permanent Collection."** Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

ROBERT FRANK
A group of contact sheets has been reconfigured by the artist so that each row contains one image from "The Americans." It's the core of this show and a complement to the Met's current exhibition on Frank's groundbreaking book. A ten-picture sequence, shot from New York bus windows in 1958, provides another example of Frank's unerring eye for the passing scene. But the other work here gives viewers an idea of how radically his approach has changed in the years since. A prime example: the 1985 grid of six large color Polaroids, incorporating small collaged pictures and bits of text (a flurry of small notes in one warns, "Curb That Lust") as well as a shadowy self-portrait of the lurking artist. Through Dec. 5. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

DAVID LEVINTHAL
Five years before publishing "Hitler Moves East," a book of his 1977 restaging of Second World War battles with toy soldiers, Levinthal took this batch of irresistibly crude, black-and-white photographs of dolls gone wild, titled "Bad Barbie." In what looks like party snaps or outtakes of surveillance footage, Barbie, Ken, and a black G.I. Joe throw their naked, segmented bodies into situations that don't always suggest consensual sex. (A sequence of Joe pulling down Barbie's top is hardly tender.) Although most of the work lacks Levinthal's later atmospherics, a few of the photographs are compelling, including one image of Barbie's suggestively raised leg emerging from a tangle of darkness—it looks like a Pierre Molinier picture in miniature. Through Dec. 5. (John McWhinnie @ Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, 50½ E. 64th St. 212-754-5626.)

Short List

ROGER BALLEN: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 23. **PHILIP GUSTON:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through Dec. 31. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Dec. 24. **PAUL MCCARTHY:** Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970. Through Dec. 9. **GERHARD RICHTER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 9. **EGON SCHIELE:** Galerie St. Etienne, 24

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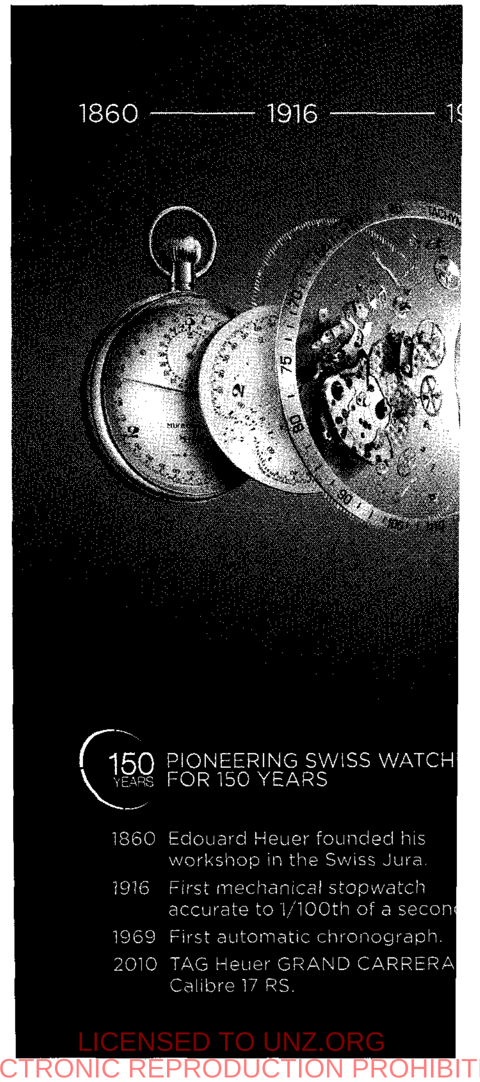
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W. 57th St. 212-245-6734. Through Jan. 23. **TOM WESSELMANN:** Haunch of Venison, 1230 Sixth Ave., at 49th St. 212-259-0000. Through Jan. 2.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ANDREA BOWERS
Call Bowers a sheep in wolf's clothing—her show is activism masquerading as art. The strategy isn't new, and others have juggled political agendas with far more wit (Martha Rosler), fire (Leon Golub), and formal grace (Felix Gonzalez-Torres). Four videos—including thirty-three rambling minutes of Bowers being trained in the art of tree-sitting—a book, a salvaged protest banner, a smattering of drawings, and a Gonzalez-Torres-like stack of broadsheets invoke environmental concerns, from Kachemak Bay, Alaska, to Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Bowers's heart is in the right place, but when she asks, in a voice-over, "How will we ever protect the environment if we can't keep women and children safe?" viewers are more likely to feel exasperated than spurred to political action. Through Dec. 5. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

RICHARD SERRA
The man of steel is back, in his first major American appearance since MOMA's 2007 retrospective. The two towering Corten steel sculptures, "Blind Spot" (2002-03) and "Open Ended" (2007-2008), may not break new ground, but to call their labyrinthine game of volume and void "same-old" would be like dismissing late Rembrandt for a predictable play of light and shadow. Art that engenders such a fierce mix of pleasure and terror—claustrophobes enter the sculptures' interiors at their own risk—is not to be missed. Through Dec. 23. (Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)

YAO LU / AARON SISKIND / JOHN WOOD
A strong group of Wood's photo-collages, made between 1955 and 2006, are the centerpiece here, but they're overshadowed by work that's showier and far more historic. Yao, a Chinese photographer making his U.S. début, adds the flash with a shrewd series of large color images inspired by classic Chinese landscape paintings. What appear to be mountains are, in fact, piles of garbage draped with construction netting and dotted with tiny pagodas, waterfalls, and industrial plants. The digital imagery is seamless; the message about the environment is pointed. But in the back room, a group of vintage Siskind photographs of found Abstract Expressionist images blows everything else—in the gallery, on the street, and in Chelsea—away. Through Dec. 12. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

Short List

LYNDA BENGLIS: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Opens Nov. 19. **WILLIAM CORDOVA:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Dec. 5. **BARBARA CRANE:** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Through Jan. 21. **CARROLL DUNHAM:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Dec. 5. **TONY FEHER:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Dec. 23. **SPENCER FINCH:** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323. Through Nov. 28. **ERIC FISCHL:** Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through Dec. 19. **DAN FLAVIN:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **WALTON FORD:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through Dec. 23. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Dec. 24. **SHARON HORVATH:** Bookstein, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-750-0949. Through Nov. 25. **MICHAEL JOO:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Dec. 5. **MIKE KELLEY:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Dec. 23. **SISTER CORITA KENT:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Dec. 5. **ANNA SCHULEIT:** Burke, 638 W. 28th St. 917-677-7825. Through Nov. 28. **SYLVIA SLEIGH:** I-20, 557 W. 23rd St. 212-645-1100. Through Dec. 31. **"BESIDES, WITH, AGAINST, AND YET: ABSTRACTION AND THE READY-MADE GESTURE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 16.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

BARRY X BALL
Ball does for classical sculpture what "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" did for Jane Austen: he turns a refined masterpiece freaky. Two Baroque busts from the permanent collection of the Ca'Rezzonico museum, in Venice, serve as his source material. Antonio Corradini's "La Purità (Dama Velata)," a portrait of a woman eerily obscured by a veil, becomes twins, copied faithfully in both milky white Iranian onyx and honeycomb calcite, a yellow stone veined with frosty white. Orazio Marinali's "La Invidia" portrays Envy as a grimacing Medusa with pendulous breasts. How could it be any creepier? Reproduced in Belgian black marble, with machined lines scoring its surface with grotesque pin-striped scars. Through Dec. 12. (Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400.)

LILLIAN BASSMAN
At ninety-two, this great American fashion photographer is making the biggest and most challenging work of her career. Whether the extravagant scale of some of the pictures in her new show is suited to images characterized by a hushed, dreamy intimacy is debatable. But as Bassman continues to reinterpret pictures made as far back as 1950, the best of these photographs convey all the energy and excitement she put into them. Many of the largest images are head shots of dark-eyed women—haughty goddesses whose ethereal glamour is exaggerated by prints that dissolve detail into powdery passages closer to pastel drawing than photography. They're spectacular, but not as persuasive as the soft-focus fashion studies here that remain Bassman's claim to fame. Through Dec. 5. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-6223.)

BRENDAN FOWLER
Fowler is a musician as well an artist, and he brings a D.I.Y. rocker's rule-smashing spirit to his pictorial-sculptural hybrids. Framed pieces—some are photographs; others suggest band posters—are violently grafted together in groups of three or more. Glass is shattered, paper is ripped, the frame of one image pierces another. It's like the scene of an aesthetic accident. Elsewhere, a group of framed red letters spell out the word "Cancelled," as if the show were an aborted gig and Fowler its AWOL headliner. Through Dec. 6. (Rental, 120 East Broadway. 212-608-6002.)

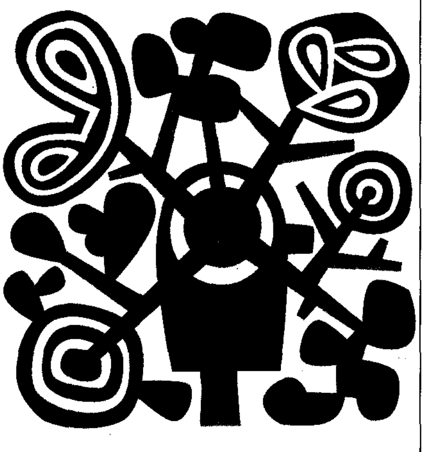
Short List

KRISTIN BAKER: Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Dec. 19. **MARCEL BROODTHAERS:** Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Dec. 23. **ERIK HANSON:** Sunday L.E.S., 237 Eldridge St. 212-253-0700. Opens Nov. 18. **STEPHEN IRWIN:** Invisible Exports, 14A Orchard St. 212-226-5447. Through Nov. 29. **KALUP LINZY:** Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212. Through Dec. 5. **ERIN SHIRREFF:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through Dec. 20. **"STUART SHERMAN: NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE":** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Dec. 20.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The company ushers in its "Nutcracker" season (Nov. 27-Jan. 3) with a gala evening, in a newly renovated theatre that features a greatly expanded pit, acoustical improvements, new side aisles, and a squared-off stage. In addition to a première—a large-scale ballet by the artistic director, Peter Mar-

WINTER ART PREVIEW



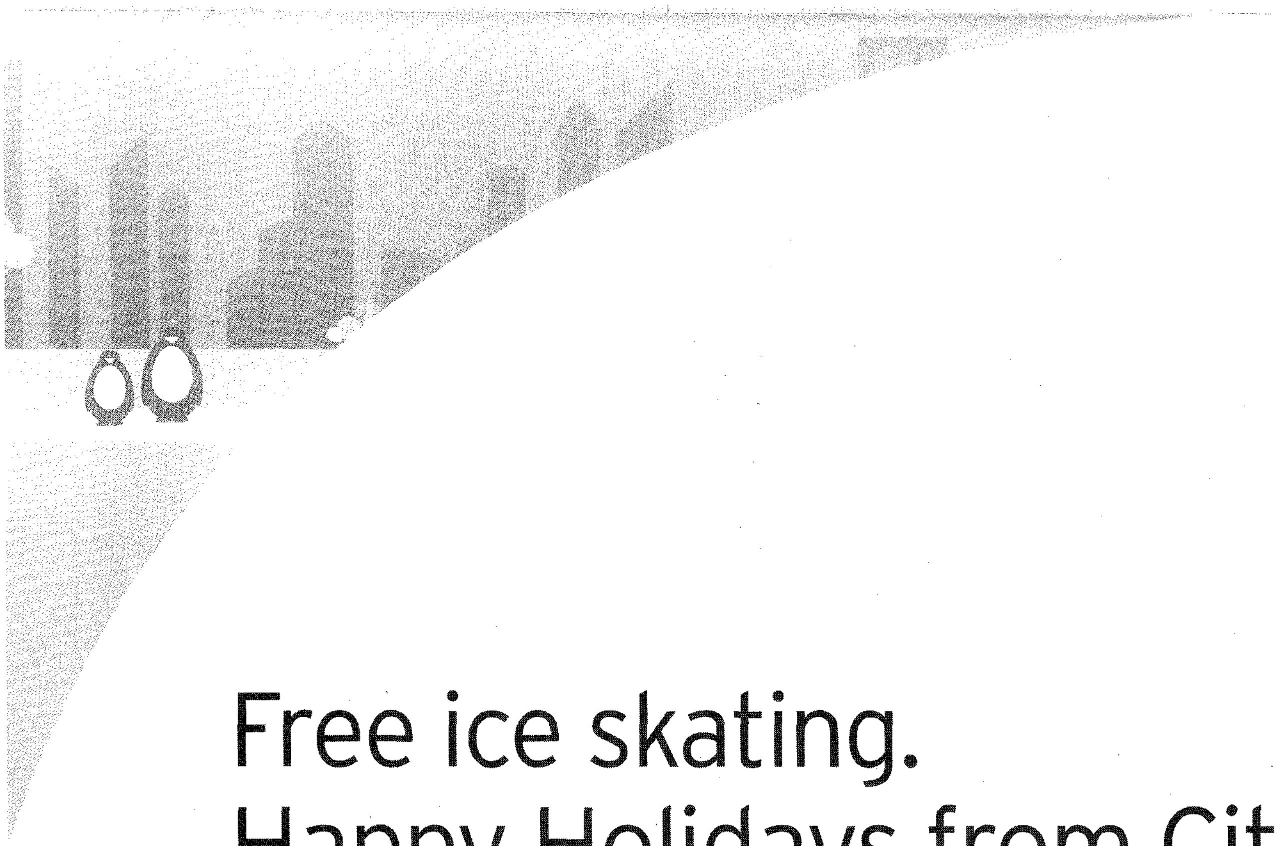
LASSE SKARBÖVIK

LIVE FROM NEW YORK
The fleeting nature of performance art makes it a risky medium for conventional exhibitions, but two museums rise to the challenge next year. "Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present," at MOMA, surveys the career of the pioneering performer, who was born in Belgrade in 1946. For the first time since she began working live, in the mid-seventies, Abramovic has sanctioned other artists to perform her pieces. They'll appear in the museum's sixth-floor galleries, where the artist herself will also début a new work. Opens March 14. ♦ Born thirty years after Abramovic, the Berlin-based Tino Sehgal—notorious for his refusal to allow his "constructed situations" to be documented in any form—transforms the Guggenheim's rotunda and ramp with choreographed movement and live intervention. The exact nature of the show is top secret, but the museum held a casting call for boys and girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Could it be that the art, like a teen-ager, will talk back? Opens Jan. 29.

EYE SLY
Born in Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1962, Gabriel Orozco deftly balances conceptual rigor and visual wit as he shifts between sculpture, photography, painting, drawing, and installation. His mid-career retrospective, at MOMA—where Orozco made his solo museum début in 1993—includes such well-known works as "Horses Running Endlessly" (1993), a four-color chessboard run riot with knights, and "La D.S." (1993), a silver Citroën meticulously reduced to two-thirds of its original width, to uncanny effect. Opens Dec. 13.

A TIMELY MANNERISM
"The Drawings of Bronzino," at the Met, rounds up almost every known work on paper—some sixty in all—by or attributed to the sixteenth-century Mannerist painter, whose exquisitely detailed, cool-as-a-cucumber portraits made him a star in the Florentine court of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and his wife, the Duchess Eleonora di Toledo. Many of the loans, from European and North American collections, have never been publicly exhibited before. Opens Jan. 20.

BI CYCLE
Every two years, the Whitney Museum weighs in on the state of contemporary American art with its always galvanizing "Biennial" exhibition. The seventy-fifth edition will be curated by the Italian-born Francesco Bonami, who also organized the 2003 Venice Biennale (the first American citizen to do so). The Whitney's Gary Carrion-Murayari will serve as associate curator. The list of participating artists will be announced early next year. Opens Feb. 25.



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tins, his ninth set to music by John Adams—the company will perform a recent hit, Alexei Ratmansky's riotous "Concerto DSCH." Watch for five newly minted principals, especially the intensely musical Tiler Peck, the soulful Robert Fairchild, and Teresa Reichlen, who illuminates each step and extension with a soft glow. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Nov. 24 at 7.)

DEBORAH HAY / YVONNE RAINER
Sharing the same stage for the first time in a quarter century, works by two sixties radicals (as part of "Performa") maintain the Judson spirit by being unalike. Hay's "If I Sing to You" is a group expansion of her influential solo practice, which attempts to regain a bodily innocence by stripping performers of their social conditioning. To that end, each cast member—Michelle Boulé, Jeanine Durning, and Ros Warby, among others—chooses her own costume and gender signifiers (including facial hair). In Rainer's recent piece "Spiraling Down," photos of Sarah Bernhardt, Pelé and his soccer ball, and Rainer's own dances merge with texts about aging and technology in a decline-of-the-West scenario for Rainer's late-period regulars—Pat Catterson, Emily Coates, Patricia Hoffbauer, and Sally Silvers. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444. Nov. 17-19 at 7:30.)

WALLY CARDONA/WC4+
"Really Real" concerns the individual amid the group, at points a much larger group than is usual for Cardona. Sections of the choreography take on the ache of adolescent bedrooms, of soloists who might prefer not to be alone. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Nov. 17 and Nov. 19-21 at 7:30.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET
The dancers of this troupe, founded by the former Ailey members Desmond Richardson and Dwight Rhoden, are gorgeous and hyper-confident; the choreography packs a punch (early Forsythe comes to mind); the music is loud; and once in a while we get to see the marvellous Richardson in action. Its fifteenth-anniversary season at the Joyce, divided into three programs, looks back but also forward, with two new works by Rhoden, "Dirty Wire" and "Mercy," as well as new pieces by the company member Juan Antonio Rodriguez and the ballet master Jae Man Joo. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 17-18 and Nov. 24 at 7:30, Nov. 19-20 at 8, Nov. 21 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 22 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 29.)

"PARADES & CHANGES, REPLAYS"
Like a period film, the restaging of Anna Halprin's 1965 piece "Parades & Changes," by the French choreographer Anne Collod (as part of "Performa"), reveals the past, the present, and the traffic in between. What was radical in 1965—composition by task-based instructions, the affectless nudity that earned Halprin a subpoena—is now beyond cliché, at least in downtown venues. Collod's production has a contemporary stylishness that touches up the beauty of a pedestrian sequence in which sheets of paper are ripped into piles like autumn leaves. The impersonal disrobing turns into avid, even animal coupling, but the accumulation of whimsical costume pieces isn't whimsical. The whole thing starts to resemble Dada stripped of fun. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 18-21 at 7:30.)

LEESAAR THE COMPANY
In its emotional nakedness, free-associative logic, and frank sensuality, the work of the Israeli-born couple Lee Sher and Saar Harari still bares traces of Ohad Naharin. That's not a bad model, especially when the movement is so inventive and arresting. In "Prima," four women stare down the audience, strike poses, shake, and speak their names. These prima donnas aren't high maintenance; the production's flaws lie in the episodic structure not made any more coherent by the soundtrack: globe-hopping beats and leftist sound bites compiled by the d.j. Filastine. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 18-20 at 8, Nov. 21 at 8 and 10, and Nov. 22 at 6.)

"SPLICE: PANIC JOURNALS"
Dance New Amsterdam unleashes a double bill of in-your-face theatre. In "The Myths and Trials of Calamity Jane and the Son of the Queen of the Amazons," Ishmael Houston-Jones, one of the most genial survivors of the eighties avant-garde, conflates the story of the American frontierswoman with that of Phaedra, the besotted Greek stepmother. Witness Relocation, the physically intrepid company led by the misleadingly named Dan Safer, stages incapacitating fear and mass hysteria in "The Panic Show." Houston-Jones and Safer also team up for an intergenerational duet, "This Ring of Fire." (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-625-8369. Nov. 19-21 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 3.)

CZECHOSLOVAK-AMERICAN MARIONETTE THEATRE
The Prague-born Vít Hořejš's intimate production of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," performed by sixteen eight-inch marionettes (and three puppeteer-actors) on three tea trays, closes La Mama's "Puppet Series." (74 E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Nov. 19-21 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 2:30. Through Nov. 29.)

LUIS LARA MALVACÍAS
The Venezuelan-born New Yorker teams up with his countryman Manuel Alfonso Pérez Torres, a dancer in the Berlin company of Sasha Waltz, to explore the physicality of laughter. "Ja!!," while happy and, yes, laugh-inducing, also touches on the inscrutability of its subject and the cynicism of its creators. It takes its title, and some of its content, from Spanish onomatopoeia and has the feel of a set improvisation, as the titular sound becomes clapping, which becomes little jumps, which become an Irish jig. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Nov. 19-21 at 8.)

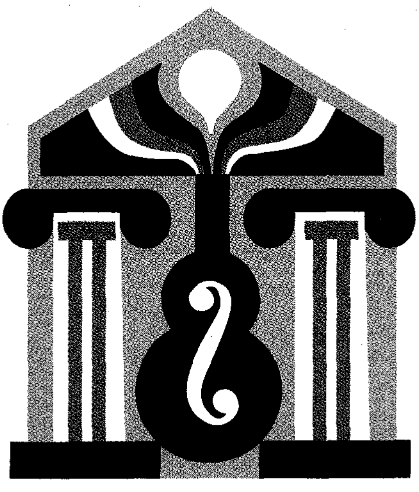
NAGANUMA DANCE
In "Nouveau Americain," Darcy Naganuma, who was raised in Hawaii, draws from a variety of disciplines, from martial arts to contemporary dance, for an exploration of such issues as the pursuit of happiness, change, and the perception of American culture. The work features art by the cartoonist Edward Koren (a contributor to this magazine) and music by the New York-based pop ensemble Brazilian Girls. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 19-21 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 3.)

COLUMBIA BALLET COLLABORATIVE
This fearless little company, put together by a group of former professionals who gave up the stage for a college degree, holds its fall showcase. The dancers, and many of the choreographers, are Columbia students. At Barnard and City Center Studios, they will perform, among others, a work by the promising young freelancer Emery LeCrone (with a guest appearance by Amar Ramasar, of New York City Ballet), as well as one by the former N.Y.C.B. principal Monique Meunier. (Streng Studio, Barnard College, 116th St. at Broadway: Nov. 19 at 9:30 and Nov. 20 at 8. New York City Center, Studio 4, 130 W. 56th St.: Nov. 21 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"FRIDAYS AT NOON" / DAVID PARKER
David Parker, a veteran of the downtown scene and the founder of the witty collective the Bang Group, presents his own work and that of his friends and collaborators Catherine Tharin, Amber Sloan, and Zack Winokur. After performing two of his breakthrough pieces, "Bang" (1991) and "Under" (1990), Parker will dance in a work in progress by Tharin; Sloan, currently a member of the Bang Group, and the very young Winokur will offer dances of their own. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 20 at noon.)

"THE LEGACY GALA"
In 1979, the Bolshoi dancers Valentina Kozlova and Leonid Kozlov defected in L.A. during a foreign tour. They went on to dance with New York City Ballet for more than a decade; since retiring, both have founded well-respected dance academies. At the Joyce, they will celebrate thirty years in the U.S., with performances by Irina Dvorovenko and Maxim Beloserkovsky, of American Ballet Theatre, Wendy Whelan, of N.Y.C.B.,

WINTER CLASSICAL PREVIEW

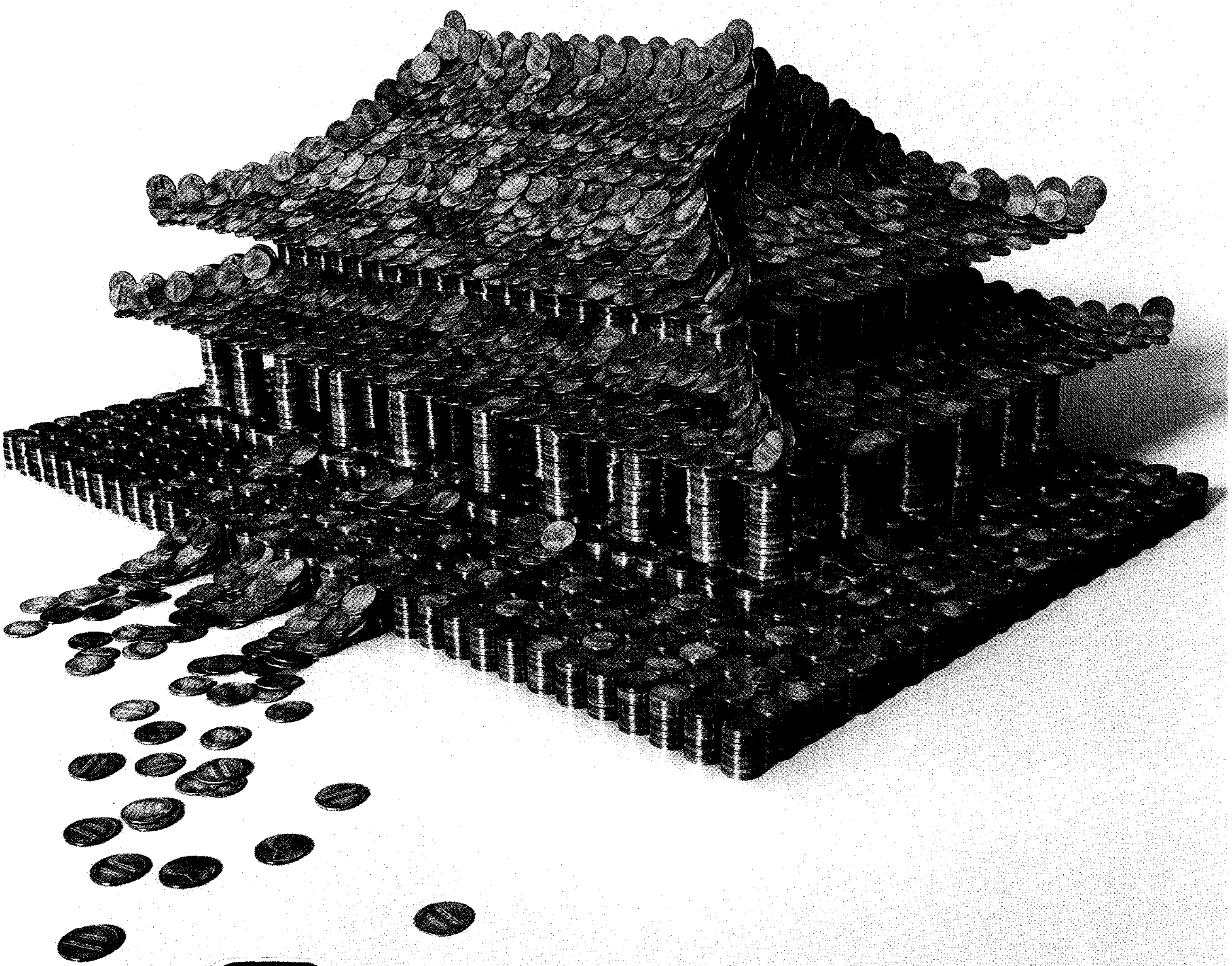


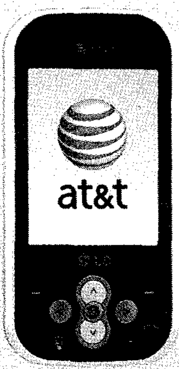
LASSE SKARBÖVIK

OPERA AS DRAMA
Night for night, the Metropolitan Opera is probably the finest opera company in the world. But the troubling absences of James Levine, a spate of high-profile cast substitutions, and the hit-or-miss record of new productions have given the Peter Gelb era, young as it is, an edge of anxiety. Bartlett Sher's Kafka-inspired production of "Les Contes d'Hoffmann" (Dec. 3-Jan. 2) holds great promise, especially if Levine, recovering from back surgery, makes it to the pit and Joseph Calleja, a vocally alluring young tenor, can take charge of the leading role. The superb Anna Netrebko, Kate Lindsey, and Alan Held will anchor the cast. ♦ The exciting Elīna Garanča, originally scheduled for the "Hoffmann" cast, sings the title role in Richard Eyre's new production of "Carmen" (beginning Dec. 31). ♦ Distinguished veterans will make crucial contributions to what seems to be an excellent Verdi season: Plácido Domingo takes on the (baritone) title role of "Simon Boccanegra" (Jan. 18-Feb. 6), and Riccardo Muti brings his considerable expertise and interpretive force to the company's first-ever production of "Attila" (Feb. 23-March 27).

ORCHESTRAL ADVENTURES
At the New York Philharmonic, the Alan Gilbert era is already paying dividends. The new and welcome contemporary-music series, "Contact!," starts off with two performances (Dec. 17 and Dec. 19) of music by Marc-André Dalbavie, Arlene Sierra, and others, conducted by Magnus Lindberg. ♦ Gilbert conducts a program that pairs John Adams's "The Wound Dresser" (a plangent setting of words by Walt Whitman, with Thomas Hampson) with Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony (Jan. 14-16) and another that features a new work by Christopher Rouse alongside performances of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony (Feb. 10-12 and Feb. 16). ♦ A concert celebrating the music of the hugely influential American composer Henry Cowell will be a standout in Leon Botstein's season with the American Symphony Orchestra, at Lincoln Center (Jan. 29). ♦ At Carnegie Hall, the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Barenboim and Boulez (Jan. 15-17), and the Concertgebouw Orchestra, with Mariss Jansons (Feb. 16-17), are but two of the attractions on offer.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall hosts the New York recital début of Philippe Jaroussky (Jan. 14), a high-flying countertenor who is renowned for both his coloratura technique and his meltingly beautiful tone. ♦ Should that prove too sugary, listeners can head to Columbia's Miller Theatre, where the Fireworks Ensemble performs a classical-instrument transcription of Lou Reed's "Metal Machine Music," an onslaught of guitar feedback that helped launch punk rock (Feb. 5).





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and the young Whitney Jensen, one of Kozlova's star pupils who is now a member of Boston Ballet. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 917-709-1981. Nov. 23 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

With its uneasy mix of emotional realism and fairy-tale splendor, Puccini's Chinese fable, **"Turandot,"** is ripe for the full Franco Zeffirelli treatment: his stage-filling designs are never less than dazzling. The regal Maria Guleghina takes the title role, with the hearty American tenor Frank Poretta making his début as Calaf. With Marina Poplavskaya as Liù; Andris Nelsons, the new director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducts. (Nov. 18 at 8 and Nov. 21 at 1.) ♦ Jack O'Brien's production of Puccini's **"Il Trittico,"** a hit of the 2006-07 season, uses big sets and broad emotions to make each of the three one-acts—the tragic "Il Tabarro" and "Suor Angelica" and the hilarious "Gianni Schicchi"—seem like a chapter in the life of a voluble Italian family. The ensemble cast is sterling, featuring such singers as Patricia Racette, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stephanie Blythe, and Alessandro Corbelli; Stefano Ranzani, making his début, conducts. (Nov. 20 at 8.) ♦ **"From the House of the Dead,"** Janáček's towering final opera, is not exactly a lovely evening at the theatre: it is a free adaptation of Dostoyevsky's novel, which chronicles the daily struggle for existence among the inmates of a tsarist prison camp. What makes it compulsory viewing at the Met—the company's premier production—is the level of talent involved, which includes the singers Peter Mattei and Kurt Streit and two illustrious débutants: the director Patrice Chéreau and the conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen. (Nov. 21 at 8 and Nov. 24 at 9.) ♦ The excellent Fabio Luisi conducts **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** featuring Annette Dasch, Lisette Oropesa, Isabel Leonard, Ludovic Tézier, and Luca Pisaroni in the leading roles. (Nov. 23 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

An untitled photograph from "Barbara Crane: Private Views," at Aperture.

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

Written in an unforgiving twelve-tone idiom that even Alban Berg might have found restrictive, Hugo Weisgall's **"Esther,"** built to last, propounds the Biblical story of the Jewish queen's brutal victory over Haman in a firmly declarative yet lyrically supple score. Premièred by City Opera in 1993, its revival begins George Steel's tenure on a confident note. With the indomitable Lauren Flanigan in the title role, and with Beth Clayton, James Maddalena, and Roy Cornelius Smith making valuable contributions to the cast; George Manahan and his well-rested orchestra offer Weisgall's complex and earnest music with enviable authority. (Nov. 19 at 8.) ♦ Christopher Alden's new production of **"Don Giovanni"** begins with a group of parishioners staging Mozart's opera as a morality play in a church basement. The set is stark, but the action is lusty, the churchgoers torn between violent erotic conquest and polite sacramental rites. Daniel Okulitch is a dreamy, debonair Don Giovanni, Jason Hardy a rugged Leporello; Stefania Dovhan, as Donna Anna, and Keri Alkema, as Donna Elvira, sing with ripe, full-bodied voices. The conductor Gary Thor Wedow meets the challenge of Mozart's jocular drama with orchestral colors that are sometimes dark, sometimes laughing, and ultimately transcendent. (Nov. 20 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 1:30.) (David H. Koch Theatre. 212-721-6500. These are the final performances of the fall season.)

BAM: "KEPLER"

The Fort Greene cultural mecca continues its decades-long love affair with Philip Glass. The U.S. première of the composer's new opera, inspired by the life of the seventeenth-century astronomer, will be performed in a "concert staging" by the Bruckner Orchestra Linz and the soloists and choir of the Upper Austrian State Theatre, conducted by a devoted colleague, Dennis Russell Davies. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Nov. 18 and Nov. 20-21 at 7:30.)

OPÉRA FRANÇAIS DE NEW YORK: "DEBUSSY AND POE"

After the success of "Pelléas et Mélisande," the Metropolitan Opera commissioned Debussy to compose a double bill of one-act operas based on texts by Edgar Allan Poe (a favorite of so many fin-de-siècle artists), which Debussy, characteristically, was unable to finish. This hardy Gotham company comes to the rescue with an original concept that blends music and words from both operas—"The Devil in the Belfry" (with a whistling Satan) and "The Fall of the House of Usher"—into a nonlinear whole. The cast includes Philip Addis, Ariadne Greif, and Michael Chioldi; Jeff Cohen is at the piano. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Nov. 20-21 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Riccardo Muti, always a sure hand on the tiller, leads the orchestra in the first program of a two-week residency flush with Romantic repertory: Liszt's "Les Préludes," Elgar's "In the South," and excerpts from Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 19 and Nov. 24 at 7:30.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Philly's musical jewel is in tough straits financially, but the orchestra retains it sumptuous sound. Christoph Eschenbach, its former music director, leads its musicians in a single, capacious work, Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 19 at 8.)

RIVERSIDE SYMPHONY: "STRINGS +"

George Rothman conducts his intrepid ensemble in a piquant program for string orchestra in which Stephen Hartke's "Alvorada" is nestled amidst repertory gems: Debussy's "Danse Sacrée et Danse Profane," Sibelius's "Rakastava," and Bartók's "Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta." (Alice Tully Hall. 212-864-4197. Nov. 21 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK VIRTUOSO SINGERS: "DUAL PASSIONS"

Harold Rosenbaum's group, which has earned its elevated name, devotes its energies to two composers who have mastered the uniquely Protestant genre: David Lang (the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Little Match Girl Passion," inspired by Bach and Hans Christian Andersen) and Heinrich Schütz (the "St. Matthew Passion"). The baritones Thomas Meglioranza and David Arnold take the solo roles. (St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, 552 West End Ave. Nov. 22 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

RECITALS

"21C LIEDERABEND"

VisionIntoArt, along with Opera on Tap and Beth Morrison Projects, presents an evening of "post-classical" songs by Osvaldo Golijov and a host of up-and-comers, including Caleb Burhans, Missy Mizzoli, and David T. Little. Hila Plitmann and Anne-Carolyn Bird (among others) sing them; the pianist Stephen Gosling and the string quartet Ethel assist. (Galapagos Art Space, 16 Main St., Brooklyn. 212-868-4444. Nov. 19 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "PIANO/PIANISTS"

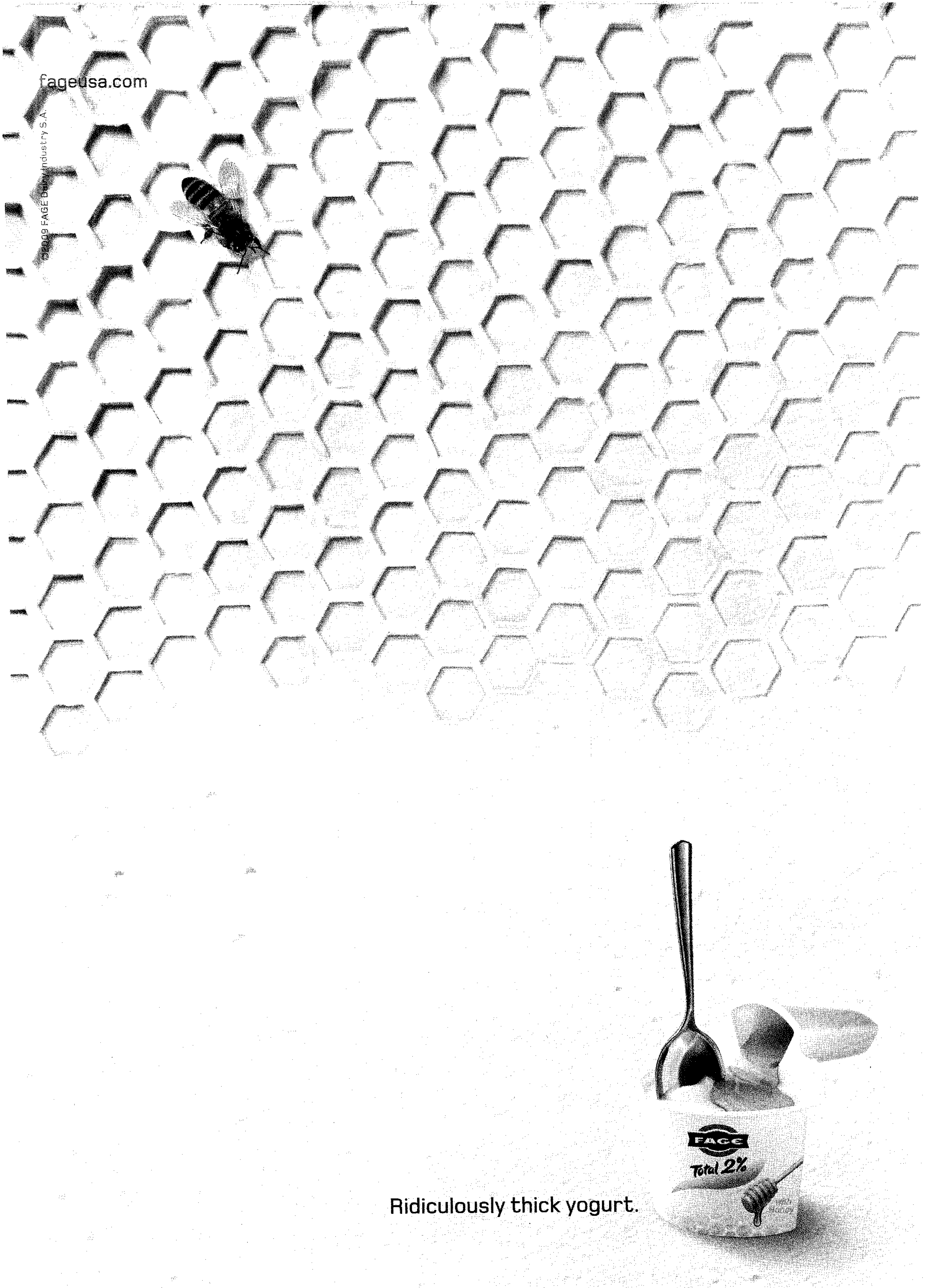
Several of the Society's impressive band of pianists—Alessio Bax, Gilbert Kalish, Anne-Marie McDermott, Juho Pohjonen, and Wu Han—perform four-hand works by Mozart, Barber ("Souvenirs"), Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, and Ravel ("La Valse"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Nov. 20 at 7:30 and Nov. 22 at 5.)

BARGEMUSIC

Nov. 20 at 8: The incisive pianist Steven Beck, a regular at the floating chamber-music series, offers a contemporary program of bracing works by Sessions, Perle (the Ballade), Carter ("Two Diversions," from 1999), Kirchner, and Babbitt. ♦ Nov. 21 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet, rich in soulful melody, performs quartets by Haydn (the "Lark") and Beethoven (the "Serioso," Op. 95), as well as Shostakovich's Piano Quintet (with Olga Vinokur). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

HAYDN TRIO EISENSTADT

The Viennese piano trio alights at the Metropolitan Museum to offer treasures by its namesake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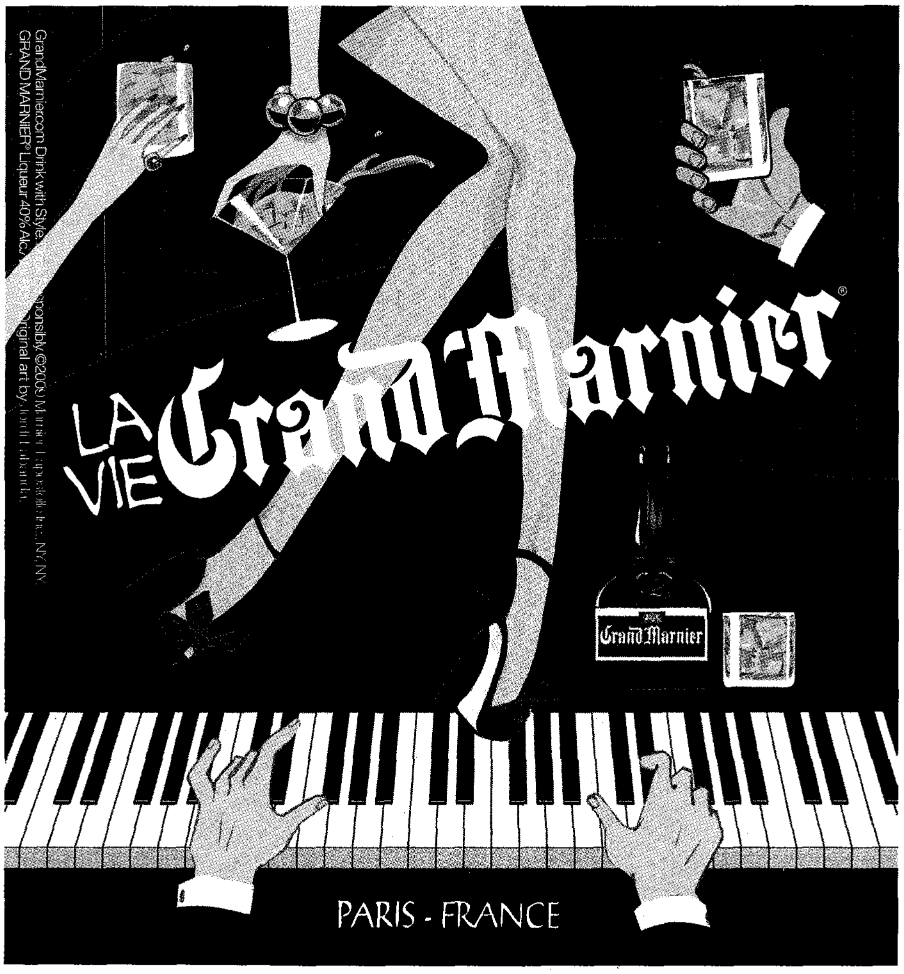
(the Trios Nos. 27 and 29, among other works) as well as new pieces by William Bolcom ("Haydn Go Seek") and Gerhard Krammer. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 21 at 7.)

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS AND TRIO MEDIEVAL
Two gilt-edged groups—masters of downtown contemporary and of early music, respectively—join forces to perform Julia Wolfe's new magnum opus, "Steel Hammer," a work inspired by the folktale of John Henry, the super-strong steel-driving man who won a race against a machine. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 21 at 7:30.)

ALFRED BRENDEL
The magisterial pianist, now in retirement, is beginning a second career as a lecturer. In one of two events this week, he hosts and introduces a program of vocal, chamber, and solo music by Franz Schubert, performed by members of Carnegie Hall's young Ensemble ACJW. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Nov. 22 at 2. For ticket information, call 212-769-7406.)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PARIS - FRANCE

"COMPOSER PORTRAIT: KAIJA SAARIAHO"
Miller Theatre's parade of modernist giants continues with an evening devoted to the luminous music of the Franco-Finnish composer, in which the International Contemporary Ensemble (along with the violinist Jennifer Koh) performs such works as "Terrestre" and "Graal Théâtre." (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Nov. 22 at 8.)

SONIA WIEDER-ATHERTON: "CHANTS D'EST"
With the Niguna Ensemble as backup, the maverick cellist (a former student of Rostropovich) performs selections from her new album, which explores folk and classical music from Eastern Europe, at an ideal venue, (Le) Poisson Rouge. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Nov. 23 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS
Werner Herzog directed this drama, in which a rogue detective (Nicolas Cage) turns into a local leader in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Co-starring Eva Mendes and Val Kilmer. Opening Nov. 20. (In wide release.)

THE BLIND SIDE
A drama, directed by John Lee Hancock and based on the nonfiction book by Michael Lewis, about an adopted teen-ager (Quinton Aaron) who is recruited by a major college-football program. Co-starring Sandra Bullock and Kathy Bates. Opening Nov. 20. (In wide release.)

BROKEN EMBRACES
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 20. (In limited release.)

DEFAMATION
A documentary directed by Yoav Shamir, about present-day anti-Semitism. Opening Nov. 20. (Cinema Village.)

FIX
Tao Ruspoli directed and co-stars in this drama, about a documentary filmmaker who, with the help of a colleague, has to get his brother into rehab by morning. Co-starring Olivia Wilde and Shawn Andrews. Opening Nov. 20. (In limited release.)

MAMMOTH
Gael García Bernal and Michelle Williams star in this drama, directed by Lukas Moodysson, about a New York couple who discover the global ramifications of their actions. Opening Nov. 20. (In limited release.)

PLANET 51
An animated comedy about an astronaut who lands on the moon and finds it inhabited by aliens. Directed by Jorge Blanco, Javier Abad, and Marcos Martinez; with the voices of Jessica Biel and John Cleese. Opening Nov. 20. (In wide release.)

RED CLIFF
John Woo directed this historical epic, set in the Han dynasty, about a politician who leads a tactical mission against warlords. In Mandarin. Opening Nov. 13. (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE SUN
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 18. (Film Forum.)

THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON
A horror-romance sequel, based on the novel by Stephenie Meyer, about a young woman in love with a vampire. Directed by Chris Weitz; starring Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, and Taylor Lautner. Opening Nov. 20. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AMELIA
Hilary Swank, as Amelia Earhart, has a big, toothy smile, high cheekbones, and short, irregular hair that seems to have been chopped by a butcher knife. Earhart's clothes—the men's pants, shirts, and leather flying jackets—perfectly fit Swank's lean, small-hipped body. Looking at her elongated sprawl and lope, we can see why Earhart's androgynous style became chic. Swank is fine, yet it's not an exciting performance, and, the way the movie has been conceived, it can't be. The director, Mira Nair, and the screenwriters, Ronald Bass and Anna Hamilton Phelan, frame their bio-pic with Earhart's doomed last flight, in 1937, but the accumulated personal and social detail in the middle of the movie lacks any great interest, and Nair's direction is rhythmless and placid. With Richard Gere, as the publishing heir and public-relations whiz George Putnam, who packages Earhart into a national celebrity and then marries her, and Ewan McGregor, as the aeronautics executive Gene Vidal, with whom she has an affair. The filmmakers' treatment of the affair is so tame that, bizarrely, seventy-five years after the fact, they appear eager to protect Earhart from scandal even as they're publicizing her secret love life. The handsome cinematography, in conventional *National Geographic* style, is by Stuart Dryburgh. The old airplanes, including a Lockheed Vega 5B, which looks like a fat bumblebee, are the most stirring sights in the movie.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/2/09.) (In wide release.)

THE BOX
A piece of religio-mystico-eschatological humbug by the undeniably talented Richard Kelly (the writer and director of "Donnie Darko"). The movie is set in 1976, soon after a photographic probe of Mars suggests that there might be "forces" out there in the universe taking an interest in us. A man in a topcoat and homburg (Frank Langella), a courtly gent who has had part of his face sheared away by a lightning bolt, shows up at the house of a NASA engineer (James Marsden) and his schoolteacher wife (Cameron Diaz). He tells them that if they push a button on a globular device he leaves behind, someone they don't know will die and they will collect a million dollars in cash. Naturally, the button gets pushed, with terrible consequences. Kelly has a tactile feeling for watery surfaces, and he works with vast industrial spaces—huge research installations that seem to be all metal exoskeleton and eerie white light. He holds us with his extravagant virtuosity and his ability to create suspense through long sequences, yet the movie is meaningless for anyone with genuine moral curiosity. It appears to be a kind of blasphemous Christian allegory propounding a vicious doctrine.—*D.D.* (11/16/09) (In wide release.)

CRACKING UP
Jerry Lewis's last feature film to date, from 1983, lives up to its title in ways that seem painfully

intentional. He stars as the nebbishy Warren Nefron, whose bleak identity is defined by the opening scenes, in which he tries and fails to commit suicide. (The attempts run throughout the film, in set pieces that are among his best ever.) In despair, Warren sees a psychiatrist (Herb Edelman), whose lame and craven methods only deepen his abyss. The comic tragedy is a bourgeois nightmare: out of work, alone, unloved, physically defenseless, spiritually unmoored, clinically clumsy, devoid of charm, Warren is condemned to life with nothing but the weight of his dark memories. Lewis plays multiple characters (including Warren's hapless ancestors and inept guru), all equally damned—but Warren's deliverance comes from a word that also serves as the film's alternate title, "Smorgasbord," which, through the plot's tenuous tricks, comes to represent nothing less than a clean slate of identity (and winks at the story's slapdash construction). But, for all the occasionally forced antics, Lewis's repeated "goodbyes" whispered directly into the camera are sincere, pathetic—and unrequited—pleas to be called back from the void.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; Nov. 18.)

LA DANSE

Frederick Wiseman, in this documentary portrait of the Paris Opera Ballet, haunts the stairways, rehearsal rooms, and watery subterranean corridors of the Palais Garnier (the Ballet's home), and we feel that we have become, with him, phantoms of the opera. The Ballet is an enormous organism at the center of which is the artistic and administrative head, the tentacular Brigitte Lefèvre, a brisk, authoritative woman, manipulative as hell. With evident pleasure, Wiseman turns back to the choreographers and dancers, whom he photographs not in the manner of the commercial cinema, where bodies are broken up into threshing limbs, but in full frame, top to bottom, with space around them, so we can see the incredible things they are capable of as well as, inevitably, their mistakes, missteps, and gradual improvements. So many of Wiseman's films have been about institutions that didn't work well, or that merely penned up the broken-down Americans who fell off the tracks of economic and physical success. It's a joyous experience to see an institution in full flower—to see not dysfunction and dereliction but the many forms of striving and virtue.—*D.D.* (11/2/09) (Film Forum.)

FANTASTIC MR. FOX

For his stop-motion adaptation of Roald Dahl's book—about a fox who steals from three grotesque farmers, who go to absurd lengths to capture him as he leads his family and friends on increasingly desperate adventures in order to survive—the director Wes Anderson, co-writing the script with Noah Baumbach, greatly amplified the story and its emotional spectrum. Mr. and Mrs. Fox (voiced by George Clooney and Meryl Streep)—he's a journalist, she's an artist—bring to life a view of marriage that's as bittersweet and insightful as that of any recent live-action movie, and their idiosyncratic son (Jason Schwartzman) is set up in a touching rivalry with his cousin (Eric Anderson, the director's brother). Visually, the movie is a wonder, with its profusion of detail and exquisitely focussed "performances" by the figurines, whom Anderson frames in images as precisely composed as those featuring actors in his live-action work. The voice performances are sparkling and apt; the adventure plot is realized with a scenographic splendor that's as understated as it is dazzling, and is also invested with a surprising moral weight. Though the emotional realms—and the philosophical twists—that Anderson evokes are unusually sophisticated for a children's film, its exuberance is a universal tonic.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

THE FRONTIER OF DAWN

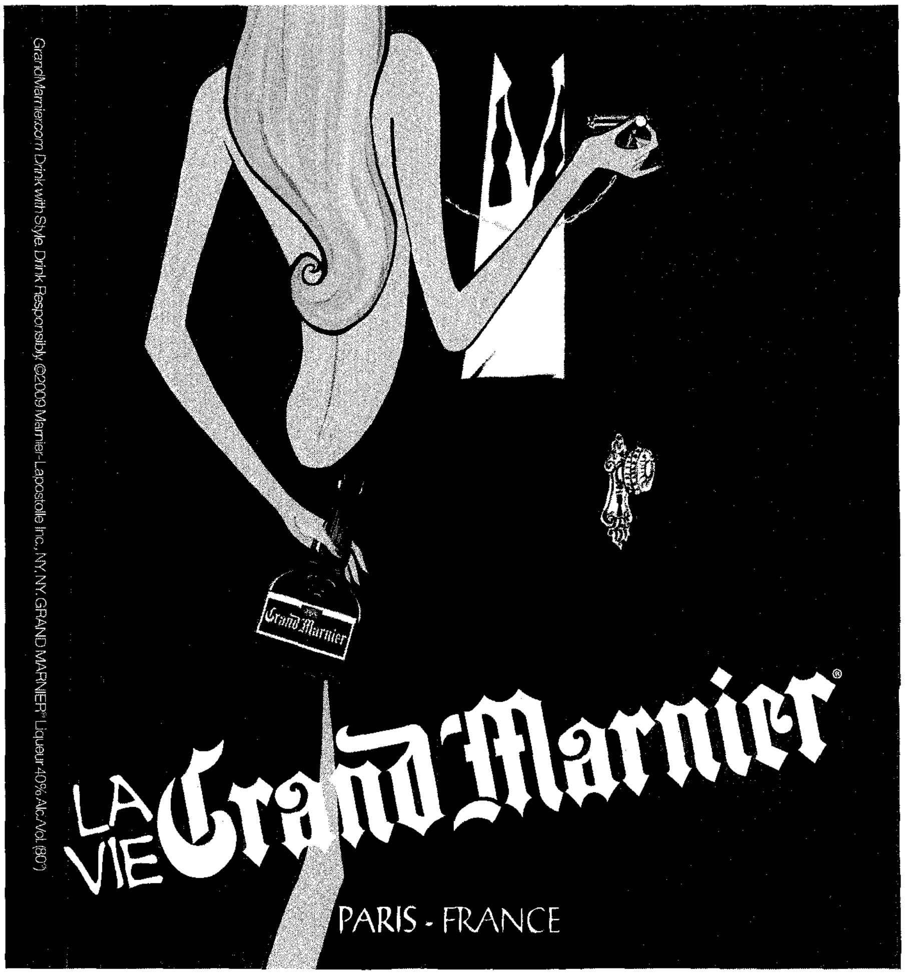
The intense romanticism of Philippe Garrel's new drama arises both from its story of love unto death and from the director's self-revealing artistry. The passionate relationship between François (Louis Garrel, the director's son), a photographer, and Carole (Laura Smet, the daughter of Johnny Hallyday and Nathalie Baye), the actress he's hired to take pictures of, is also that of the director's camera with the actress. The cinematographer William Lubtchansky's silken black-and-white images caress, with a transcendently chaste sense of rapture, every trait of Smet's luminous face: her clear skin, sparkling eyes, arched hairline, and classical lips. When circumstances pry Carole and François apart, the plot enters the familiar realm of *l'amour fou*; even in her absence, the actress remains an indomitable force in the photographer's life. Within the modernistically shattered framework of conventional melodrama, Philippe Garrel conveys an extravagant, heartfelt blend of tenderness, pain, and longing. In French.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Nov. 20-22.)

GENTLEMEN BRONCOS

Compared with this wildly inventive, audacious, and genre-swirling comedy, the director Jared Hess's first two films, "Napoleon Dynamite" and "Nacho Libre," are models of narrative sobriety. The story is straightforward enough: Benjamin (Michael Angarano), a lonely teen-ager being homeschooled by his poor single mother (Jennifer Coolidge) in a dome-shaped house somewhere west of the Rockies, salves his soul by writing and illustrating whacked-out science-fiction fantasies. When he enters one in a story contest, his idol, the popular novelist Ronald Chevalier (Jemaine Clement), passes it off as his own and turns it into a best-seller. Meanwhile, two threadbare local filmmakers (Halley Feiffer and Hector Jimenez) also get hold of the property. Astonishingly, Hess turns this fable-like premise into a juvenile but grand-scale vision of earth and Heaven. The small and pious town is filled with Bosch-like grotesques and jolting details (such as a store's lingerie department's facing the gun counter), but it's transfigured by Hess's parallel worlds: Chevalier's supercilious version of Benjamin's story and the teen filmmakers' cheesy one are set against cosmic, transcendent—and ridiculously jejune—scenes from Benjamin's own imagination. The events are superintended by a stranger dressed in white: Dusty (Mike White, who also co-produced), Benjamin's guardian angel. Hess, who is from a Mormon community, blends local color with celestial inspiration to create a forthright and original religious vision matched by few films, whether dramatic or comic.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

GOOD HAIR

Chris Rock's documentary takes as its starting point a question posed by his daughter: "Daddy, why don't I have good hair?" To answer that question and the many others that surround it, Rock relies mainly on the personal stories of black women to weave a funny, tangled tale about the role of natural and straightened hair in the African-American community—and, by extension, about broader issues of identity, beauty, and economics. The structure is traditional, alternating between talking-head interviews and comic travel pieces—Rock journeys to India (where most of the hair sold for extensions originates) and to Los Angeles (where he does a brief Borat-like bit trying to sell black hair to hair shops). Though the film deals with one narrow aspect of African-American life, its scope is surprisingly universal, due in large part to the wise, funny, and forthright interviews, with such subjects as the poet Maya Angelou, the actress Raven-Symoné, the rappers Salt and Pepa, and a group of barbershop patrons who deserve special mention for their frank discussion of the difficulties of touching a black woman's hair during intimate moments. Meanwhile, the microeconomics of hair treatment are communicated vividly—elab-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orate weaves can cost five thousand dollars—and the film is framed by the Bronner Brothers' black-hair show in Atlanta, which builds to a Battle Royale that pits the country's top hairdressers against one another in an unforgettably surreal spectacle.—*Ben Greenman* (In limited release.)

THE HAND OF FATIMA

This documentary by Augusta Palmer, about her father—the rock critic Robert Palmer, who died in 1997, at the age of fifty-two—is anchored by his devotion to the Master Musicians of Jajouka, a legendary group of Sufi trance musicians who were famously associated with Beat writers (including William S. Burroughs) and such rock acts as the Rolling Stones. Palmer made many pilgrimages to Morocco to experience the group at first hand and to soak in their spiritual essence, and his daughter's film is, in part, a travelogue in which she retraces his journeys. It's also an ethnomusicological study of the Master Musicians, a family-centered autobiography, and a critical biography of her father, who left behind an important body of work that explored the roots of American rock music. The material is rich, sometimes too rich—there are manic seventies drug tales, domestic soap operas, exotic locales, interviews with her father's colleagues and fellow-travellers, and representations of rock criticism through a mix of photography, animation, and narration—and the sprawl is occasionally overwhelming. But the film ultimately succeeds in shedding kaleidoscopic light on both the man and the music.—*B.G.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS

Believe it or not, the U.S. Army used to contain a special unit that was devoted exclusively to the use of psychic power as a tool of war. That, at any rate, is the scoop dug up by Bob Wilton (Ewan McGregor), an eager reporter based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. En route to Iraq, he encounters a restive figure named Cassidy (George Clooney), who claims to have been a "Jedi Warrior"—a secret operative trained in mental combat. His reminiscences revolve around a man named Django (Jeff Bridges), who urged his super-recruits to run through walls and peer into the future. So clearly is this the comic heart of Grant Heslov's film that he gets stuck in a loop of flashbacks; these are so diverting (especially when Kevin Spacey rolls up as Django's nemesis) that they drain the fun from the adventures of Cassidy and the Wilton kid, which seem hapless and inconsequential by comparison. The script, by Peter Straughan, is adapted from a nonfiction book by the British journalist Jon Ronson, and it's no surprise that the leading men, with Clooney in good fettle, should relish the battle of deluded wits; yet the story, even if parts of it are provable, barely feels like a story at all, let alone a durable satire on military policy. It's more like a string of larks and skits, dangling in space, waiting for a plot to come along.—*Anthony Lane* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE MESSENGER

Captain Tony Stone (Woody Harrelson), an Army lifer with a shaved head and a jaw like a stone jetty, and Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery (Ben Foster), a coiled, secretive Iraqi war hero, work together at what is surely the worst job in the armed forces: telling parents and spouses that a loved one has been killed in Iraq. There's an excruciatingly obvious but unavoidable irony here: the movie itself has taken on the unwelcome task of telling its audience what it doesn't want to hear—news of the way families get hit by an unending war. Yet it doesn't feel dutiful or solemn. This is a fully felt, morally alert, marvellously acted piece of work. Harrelson, with his eye-popping glare and acetylene voice, takes his usual wild-man character deep into melancholy and loneliness; the mesmerizing Foster, whose eyes seem to look inward and outward at the same time, eases the tense, guilty war hero back into life. The two form an uneasy, carousing friendship. The visits to the families are done with great delicacy, but great courage, too, and after a while we feel not like voyeurs but like participants. With a droopy, passive Samantha Morton—the movie's only weakness—as a widow whom the sergeant falls in love with. The director, Oren Moverman (a veteran of the Israeli Army), is clearly a whiz with actors. He co-wrote the script with Alessandro Camon.—*D.D.* (11/16/09) (In wide release.)

PIRATE RADIO

A great subject made into a prankish, tiresome movie. In the mid-sixties, when the BBC was still monopolizing radio in Great Britain, a rogue operator, broadcasting from a ship anchored in the North Sea, plays rock to a country that could only hear the Beatles and the Stones live or by going to a record store. Richard Curtis, the screenwriter of "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and the director of "Love Actually," fills the floating station with a scroungy lot of misfits and oddballs. But instead of making a movie about what the music meant, Curtis, aping the manner of a naughty English picture from about 1955, has made a movie about the sexual arrangements on board. He's like a liberated uncle, making sure that everyone gets laid. The teasing and jokes and sexless sex scenes never coalesce into anything. With Bill Nighy as the owner of the station; Rhys Ifans as a super-cool stud d.j.; Philip Seymour Hoffman as an American wild man; Tom Sturridge as a high-school dropout who loses his cherry; and Kenneth Branagh, cursed with a Hitler mustache, in a cartoonish role as an authoritarian government minister trying to bring the floating station down.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

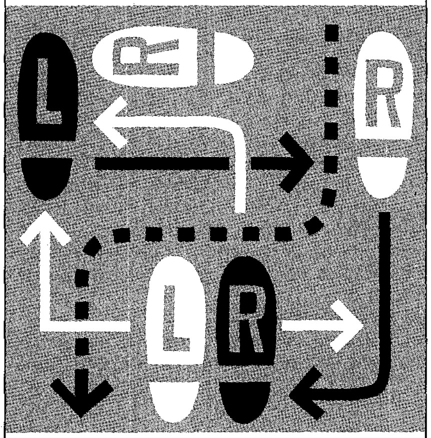
PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE

How you respond to Lee Daniels's film is likely to depend on two variables: first, to what extent the preposterous title will get your tongue in a twist, and second, whether or not you object to having extreme domestic abuse waved in front of your face. Gabourey Sidibe plays an obese, unhappy Harlem teen-ager named Clareece Jones; the task of the movie is to turn her nickname, Precious, from a wretched irony to a cause for pride—to surround her with people who will treasure her as she deserves. At the start, this seems a distant dream, since Precious is pregnant with her second child (fathered by her own father) and trapped at home with her monster of a mother (Mo'Nique)—a withering portrait of indolence and wrath. (Might conservatives latch onto the film as a cautionary tale about an obsessive reliance on welfare? If so, that hardly seems to be what Daniels intended.) Precious finds hope in an alternative-school program, where she meets the beautiful and saintly—not to say implausible—figure of Blu Rain (Paula Patton). The tonal blend of damp-eyed fantasy and gruelling, closeup brutishness is at once morally suspect and highly effective in its manipulations; what rescues the story from the brink of the gothic is the poise and purpose of its leading performers—including Mariah Carey, no less, who is almost unrecognizable in her role as a social worker.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE SUN

This drama, about the end of the Second World War as experienced by Hirohito, is, in effect, the Russian director Alexander Sokurov's "Inglourious Basterds"; rather than offering counterfactuals, Sokurov presents a fascinating but scattershot array of mere factuals, which lands as far from the full story as Quentin Tarantino's fantasy. Sokurov presents the emperor as effete and detached—he mumbles to himself while piddling away the war years on marine biology—and dramatizes his unquestioned authority over obsequious underlings, from servants to military commanders, on the basis of his ostensible divinity. Sheltered in his bunker, Hirohito informs his servants that the war was caused by the discriminatory American immigration policies of 1924. It's hard to know whether Sokurov is revealing epochal ignorance or a dignified man's charge against an objectionable nation of barbarians. But Sokurov's horrific animated vision of American bombing raids—together with his depiction of the gruff treatment of the emperor by General Douglas MacArthur—seems to suggest that Japan's imperial culture may just have been too refined to withstand the crude realities of modern

WINTER DANCE PREVIEW



LASSE SKARBOVIK

TURNING POINTS

Australia's Chunky Move, directed by the choreographer Gideon Obarzanek, presents the technologically and visually sophisticated production "Mortal Engine," at BAM (Dec. 9-12). ♦ "The Good Dance," a long-gestating and eagerly anticipated collaboration between Reggie Wilson, based in Brooklyn, and Andréya Ouamba, based in Dakar, arrives at BAM (Dec. 16-19). ♦ The death of Merce Cunningham has prompted a search for heirs. The British choreographer Richard Alston is certainly comparable in his classicism and invention, but he's musical in a more Balanchinean sense. At the Joyce, the Richard Alston Dance Company will perform a delightful trio of dances, set to Stravinsky, Philip Glass, and Hoagy Carmichael (Jan. 12-17). ♦ The Mark Morris Dance Company returns to BAM (Feb. 23-27) with a new work set to "Socrates," Satie's symphonic drama in three acts; "Looky" (2007), a witty riff on the pretenses of viewing art; and "Behemoth" (1990), set, uncharacteristically, to silence. ♦ Paul Taylor, who turns eighty next year, comes to City Center with last season's masterful "Beloved Renegade"; a new piece set to Debussy, "Brief Encounters"; and such favorites as "Brandenburgs," "Airs," and "Piazzolla Caldera" (Feb. 24-March 14).

FESTIVAL FANFARE

The New York Flamenco Festival, which has lost steam in recent years, finds new fuel for its tenth anniversary (Feb. 11-21), in a solo show by a young Spaniard it introduced to New York audiences: Rocío Molina, the kind of talent who gives hope for the future. ♦ The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival (Feb. 26-March 28) retrenches a little, returning to its home theatre for a chummy month of reminiscence, José Limón, and artists brought together by Doug Varone, Yoshiko Chuma, and Molissa Fenley.

LA DANSE

New York City Ballet's winter season (Jan. 5-Feb. 28), at the David H. Koch, is dominated by evening-length ballets: Peter Martins's brutal "Romeo + Juliet" and his stagings of "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Swan Lake"; Balanchine's magical "A Midsummer Night's Dream" will be followed by his sumptuous "Jewels." ♦ Peter Boal brings his excellent ensemble, the Pacific Northwest Ballet, to the Joyce, where they will perform recent commissions: Twyla Tharp's "Opus 111" and Benjamin Millepied's "3 Movements" (Jan. 5-10). ♦ Embarrassing as the title may be, "Kings of the Dance," at City Center (Feb. 19-21), is nevertheless a golden opportunity to see seven of the world's finest male dancers, including David Hallberg, a refined classicist; Marcelo Gomes, a deeply musical Romantic; the Bolshoi's Nikolay Tsiskaridze; the Canadian Guillaume Côté, an expansive, lyrical danseur; and the Russian Denis Matvienko, a fiery pyrotechnician.

power. Meanwhile, the usually meticulous director films the grand political stage with a generic studio realism. His blandly selective view of history is not merely ambiguous; it's nearly blank. In Japanese and English.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

THIS IS IT

Michael Jackson's death this summer came as the singer was preparing for an extended run at London's O2 arena that Jackson said would be his last live appearances ever. This documentary, pieced together by the choreographer and director Kenny Ortega from tour-diary footage filmed in Los Angeles, is noteworthy more for what it isn't than for what it is: it's not morbid, not particularly hagiographic, not boring, not softheaded, and not exploitive. Instead, it's a fascinating look at the clockwork of a massive pop show and an indirect portrait of the greatest pop performer of the last fifty years. Jackson's intelligence as a performer and C.E.O. of his own brand is on display throughout, and there are several transcendent set pieces, from a sexy "The Way You Make Me Feel" to a "Smooth Criminal" that inserts Jackson into old movie footage alongside Rita Hayworth, Humphrey Bogart, and Edward G. Robinson. At times, Jackson seems tired, but he never comes off as unprofessional, joyless, or detached.—*B.G.* (In wide release.)

THE TRUE GLORY

An Anglo-American popular front dedicated to fairness, teamwork, and freedom—that's the image of Operation Overlord immortalized in this government-produced documentary from 1945. With crackerjack moviemaking and none of the mustiness or restraint of official history, it chronicles the Allied conquest of Nazi-occupied Europe. The co-directors—the British Carol Reed and the American Garson Kanin—deployed fourteen hundred cameramen and a hundred and thirty voices of servicemen and servicewomen from every military branch and Allied country to convey the experience of the invasion, from the preparations for D-Day to the aftermath of Berlin's fall. Sometimes the words and images intensify each other, as when a G.I. analyzes the faces of German prisoners; at other times they work in counterpoint, especially during the stunning rendering of the Battle of the Bulge, when a Yank says he grew used to seeing strangers instead of friends next to him on the front. The filmmakers' treatment of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp couldn't be more apt. When one liberator is at a loss for words, Reed and Kanin compensate with images of unspeakable horror. This film's alternation of tact and candor make it a humanist milestone as well as a landmark of fact-based filmmaking.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Nov. 19.)

UNCERTAINTY

Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Lynn Collins star as young lovers in New York who move through two alternating stories—one, an affectionate drama, depicting a family gathering, with troubles and uncertainties roiling below the surface; the other, a thriller, set in Chinatown, in which the couple finds a lost cell phone filled with compromising information, witness a murder, and get chased through Mott Street by an assassin. The team of Scott McGehee and David Siegel wrote and directed. The way the two stories comment on each other is more of a structural gimmick than a dramatic device, but the directors achieve an unusual degree of intimacy between the lovers, and the movie is gripping to the end. Handheld cinematography by Rain Li.—*D.D.* (IFC Center.)

VOYAGE TO ITALY

One of the most quietly revolutionary works in the history of cinema, Roberto Rossellini's third feature starring Ingrid Bergman (his wife at the time), from 1953, turns romantic melodrama into an intellectual adventure. An English couple—Alex Joyce (George Sanders), a cynical, supercilious businessman, and his sensitive, cultured wife, Katherine (Bergman)—arrive in Naples to deal with an inheritance. As they travel alone together for the first time in eight years of childless marriage, their festering estrangement, from each other and from their comfortable way of life, bursts into open conflict. Filming on location, Rossellini devotes as much attention to the Italian settings and their cultural treasures as to the characters wandering among them; at Pompeii, the entwined bodies of lovers blasted by Vesuvius put an existential spin on Katherine's misery. Rossellini's ambitious political agenda—regarding the discontents of a new managerial class—only heightens the drama: the elegant couple's separation is wrenching, and their last chance at reconciliation is transcendently moving. Here, the young French New Wave critics learned to fuse Hollywood style with European philosophy, to make high-relief drama on a low budget.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Nov. 21 and Nov. 23.)

Also Playing

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In wide release. **COLLAPSE:** In limited release. **THE FOURTH KIND:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Through Nov. 19: The films of Jerry Lewis. Nov. 18 at 7: "The Errand Boy" (1961). ♦ Nov. 18 at 9: "Cracking Up" (†). ♦ Nov. 19 at 7: "The Family Jewels" (1965). ♦ Nov. 19 at 9: "Three on a Couch" (1966). ♦ Special screenings. Nov. 20 at 7 and 9:15 and Nov. 21-22 at 4:45, 7, and 9:15: "The Frontier of Dawn" (†). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Nov. 21 at 4: A Stan Brakhage program, including "The Weir-Falcon Saga" (1970). ♦ Nov. 22 at 4: "The Text of Light" (1974, Brakhage). ♦ Nov. 22 at 5:30: Short films, including "Un Chien Andalou" (1928, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali; silent). ♦ Nov. 22 at 7:30: "Los Olvidados" (1950, Buñuel; in Spanish).

ASIA SOCIETY

725 Park Ave., at 70th St. (212-517-2742)—The films of Tsai Ming-Liang. Nov. 21 at 3: "The Hole" (1998). ♦ Nov. 21 at 5: "What Time Is It There?" (2001).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

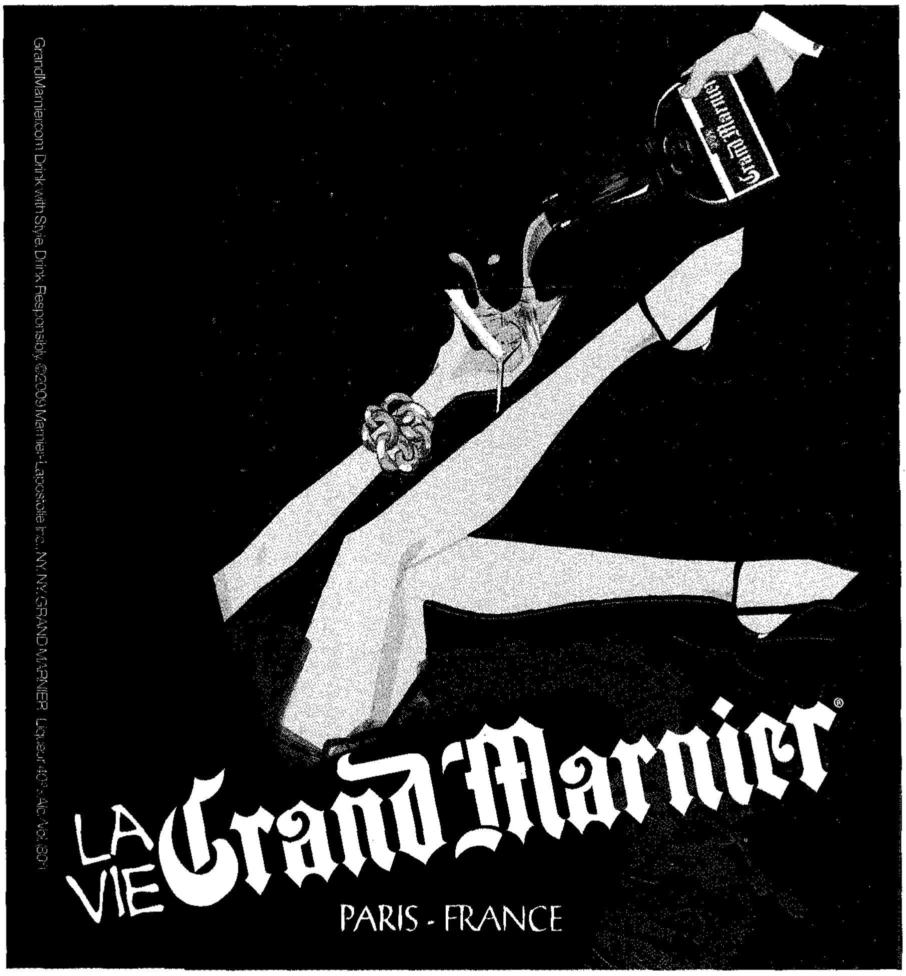
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In première. Nov. 18 at 6:50 and 9:40: "A Well Paid Walk" (2009, Milos Forman). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director, moderated by Scott Foundas. ♦ "New Czech Films." All films are in Czech. Nov. 19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40: "Who's Afraid of the Wolf?" (2008, Maria Procházková). ♦ Nov. 20 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Citizen Havel" (2008, Pavel Koutecký and Miroslav Janek). ♦ Nov. 21 at 4:30 and 9:40: "Tobruk" (2008, Václav Marhoul). ♦ Nov. 21 at 2 and 6:50: "René" (2008, Helena Treštíková). ♦ Nov. 22 at 2 and 6:50: "The Karamazovs" (2008, Petr Zelenka). ♦ Nov. 22 at 4:30 and 9:35: "I'm All Good" (2008, Jan Hrebejk). ♦ Special screenings. Nov. 23 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Royal Family of Broadway" (1930, George Cukor and Cyril Gardner). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with Elliott Stein. ♦ The films of Liv Ullmann. Nov. 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Shame" (1968, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 18-19 at 1, 3:45, 7, and 9:35: "The Red Shoes" (1948, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). ♦ Nov. 20-Dec. 3 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Mr. Hulot's Holiday" (1953, Jacques Tati).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Italian Neo-Realism." All films are in Ital-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ian. Nov. 18 at 1, Nov. 21 at 7:20, and Nov. 22 at 1:30: "I Vitelloni" (1953, Federico Fellini). ♦ Nov. 18 at 3:10 and Nov. 21 at 1:30: "Bread, Love and Dreams" (1953, Luigi Comencini). ♦ Nov. 19 at 2 and 6:15: "The City Stands Trial" (1952, Luigi Zampa). ♦ Nov. 19 at 4 and 8:15: "The Overcoat" (1952, Alberto Lattuada). ♦ Nov. 21 at 3:30 and Nov. 23 at 2 and 6:15: "Voyage to Italy" (†). ♦ Nov. 21 at 5:30: "Umberto D." (1952, Vittorio De Sica). ♦ Nov. 21 at 9:30: "Accattone" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini). ♦ Nov. 22 at 3:40: "Salvatore Giuliano" (1962, Francesco Rosi). ♦ Nov. 22 at 8:30: "Il Posto" (1961, Ermanno Olmi). ♦ Nov. 23 at 4 and 8:15: "Chronicle of Poor Lovers" (1954, Carlo Lizzani). ♦ Nov. 24 at 2 and 6:15: "Il Grido" (1957, Michelangelo Antonioni). ♦ Nov. 24 at 4:15 and 8:30: "Bandits of Orgosolo" (1960, Vittorio De Seta). ♦ Special screening. Nov. 20 at 7: "The Hoodlum" (1919, Sidney Franklin; silent).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 22: The films of François Truffaut. Nov. 24 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Small Change" (1976; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Nov. 21-22 at 11 A.M.: "Millions" (2005, Danny Boyle). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 20-21: "Jabberwocky" (1977, Terry Gilliam). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 24 at 8: "Double Dare" (2003, Amanda Micheli).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Nov. 18-20 at 1:30: "The Birth of a Nation" (1915, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ "Best Years: Going to the Movies, 1945-46." Nov. 18 at 4 and Nov. 21 at 1: "The Last Chance" (1945, Leopold Lindtberg). ♦ Nov. 18 at 7: "The North Star" (1943, Lewis Milestone). ♦ Nov. 19 at 4:30: "The True Glory" (†) and "Two Down and One to Go" (1945, Frank Capra). ♦ Nov. 23 at 4:30: "Canyon Passage" (1946, Jacques Tourneur). ♦ "Nuts and Bolts: Machine Made Man." "Die Puppe" (1919, Ernst Lubitsch; silent). ♦ The films of Tim Burton. Nov. 18 at 8: "Pee-wee's Big Adventure" (1985). ♦ Nov. 19 at 8: "Beetlejuice" (1988). ♦ Nov. 20 at 8: "Batman" (1989). ♦ Nov. 21 at 5: "Edward Scissorhands" (1990) and "Vincent" (1982). ♦ Nov. 21 at 8: "Batman Returns" (1992). ♦ Nov. 22 at 3:30: "Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas" (1993). ♦ Nov. 22 at 5:30: "Ed Wood" (1994) and "Frankenweenie" (1984). ♦ Nov. 23 at 8: "Mars Attacks!" (1996). ♦ "Best Film Not Playing at a Theater Near You, 2009." Nov. 19 at 6 and Nov. 22 at 2:30: "October Country" (2009, Michael Palmieri and Donal Mosher). ♦ Nov. 19 at 8:15 and Nov. 21 at 6: "You Won't Miss Me" (2009, Ry Russo-Young). ♦ Nov. 20 at 6 and Nov. 22 at 12:30: "Zero Bridge" (2008, Tariq Tapa). ♦ Nov. 20 and Nov. 22 at 8:30: "Everything Strange and New" (2009, Frazer Bradshaw). ♦ Nov. 21 at 3 and Nov. 22 at 6: "Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench" (2009, Damien Chazelle).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 20 at 9:30: "Vampyr" (1932, Carl Theodor Dreyer), introduced by Ellen Kushner.

READINGS AND TALKS

"LIPSTICK TRACES: LIVE"
Greil Marcus celebrates the twentieth anniversary of "A Secret History of the Twentieth Century" by elevating the notion of a lecture to a live performance. (Altschul Auditorium, International Affairs Building, Columbia University, 420 W. 118th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 19 at 6.)

OLD FIRST REFORMED CHURCH
Jonathan Safran Foer reads from and discusses his new book about food, "Eating Animals." (729 Carroll St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-783-3075. Nov. 19 at 6:30.)

"THE NEW SALON"
The Poetry Society of America brings together the poets Nick Flynn and Deborah Landau for an evening of conversation. (Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, New York University, 58 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 19 at 7.)

SKYSCRAPER MUSEUM
The architecture critic Paul Goldberger, a writer for this magazine, talks about his work. (39 Battery Pl. No tickets are necessary, but reservations are required. E-mail programs@skyscraper.org for a reservation. Nov. 23 at 6:30.)

EXPLORERS CLUB
Richard Ellis discusses his new book, "On Thin Ice: The Changing World of the Polar Bear." (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383. Nov. 23 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BIG APPLE CIRCUS
Manhattan's one-ring wonder is back for the season. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. For more information, visit www.bigapplecircus.org. Through Jan. 18.)

THE POND AT BRYANT PARK
More than just the trees change with the seasons at Bryant Park, the midtown oasis noted for its expansive lawn and never-ending parade of lunchtime office workers. Each fall, the foliage gives way to a skating rink. There are other rinks in Manhattan, but none of them are free, as this one is, and few boast such remarkable surroundings. (For more information, visit www.thepondatbryantpark.com. Through Jan. 24.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Modern and contemporary art predominates at **Sotheby's** Latin-American sale (Nov. 18-19). Botero, as always, has a strong presence, with nine works ranging from drawings and sculptures (including one of a couple in a dancers' embrace) to fetching oils. The sale also includes a healthy selection of works by Mexican artists and an early canvas by the Chilean surrealist Matta, "Endless Nudes," a kind of placid dreamscape rendered with layered waves and crevasses of strange, unnatural colors. The house devotes Nov. 24 to Judaica and Israeli art, with ceremonial artifacts, Hebrew manuscripts, and printed books in the morning and paintings, photographs, and sculptures in the afternoon. The morning sale features an extremely rare manuscript, a Torah scroll from the Iberian Peninsula dating from the thirteenth century, said to be the earliest known complete Torah scroll from Spain. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** sale of Latin-American art continues for a second day (Nov. 18), with more works by Botero, Tamayo, and Lam; one of the pieces for sale is a cartoonish rendition of a gaucho on the plains (preparing to capture a terrified ostrich with his bolas, a traditional weapon), by the Argentinean humorist and illustrator Florencio Molina Campos. This is followed by a large sale of European decorative art (furniture, ceramics, lamps, mirrors, and carpets) from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries (Nov. 24). Of particular interest are the rugs, including a large group of intricate, richly hued Isfahan carpets, several of which hail from the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Just as the late-fall doldrums begin to get us down, **Swann** holds one of its sunny sales of vintage travel prints (Nov. 18). Among the standouts in a large trove of British posters are an adorable and stylish image depicting four gorgeous penguins, entitled "For the Zoo," designed in 1921 by Charles Paine, and the charming "Summer's Joy," by Laura Knight (also from 1921), in which two strapping girls in modest bathing suits prepare to take a swim in a chilly-looking lake. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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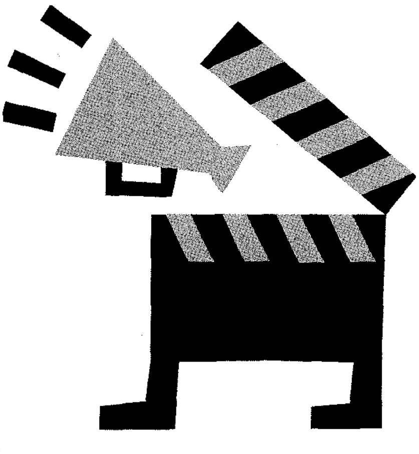
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.

WINTER MOVIES PREVIEW



LASSE SKARBÖVIK

REAL LIVES
The deeds of great people exert their fascination on-screen, beginning with "Me and Orson Welles" (Nov. 25), Richard Linklater's view of the young genius (Christian McKay) in New York, as seen through the eyes of a (fictitious) teen-age actor (Zac Efron). ♦ The elderly Leo Tolstoy (Christopher Plummer) and his religious obsessions are at the center of Michael Hoffman's "The Last Station" (Dec. 4). ♦ Clint Eastwood returns to the bio-pic with "Invictus" (Dec. 11), about Nelson Mandela (Morgan Freeman) and his attempt to unite his country through its rugby team. ♦ Emily Blunt stars in Jean-Marc Vallée's "The Young Victoria" (Dec. 18), a drama focussed on the queen's romance with Prince Albert (Rupert Friend). ♦ In "Creation" (Jan. 22), directed by Jon Amiel, Charles Darwin (Paul Bettany) discovers evolution and clashes with religion.

FICTIONAL LIVES
Several popular characters return in new guises. "Sherlock Holmes" (Dec. 25), Guy Ritchie's period thriller, stars Robert Downey, Jr., as the super-sleuth, and Jude Law, as Watson. ♦ In "The Wolfman" (Feb. 10), directed by Joe Johnston, the classic werewolf returns to confront Benicio Del Toro and Emily Blunt. ♦ Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" (March 5) features Mia Wasikowska, Anne Hathaway, and Johnny Depp.

FROM DISTANT SHORES
Some of the films submitted for the Foreign Language Film Oscar are coming soon, including "Home" (Nov. 27), from Switzerland, directed by Ursula Meier and starring Isabelle Huppert, about a family that endures hardships when a highway is built near its house. ♦ Corneliu Porumboiu directed the Romanian drama "Police, Adjective" (Dec. 23), in which a police officer has doubts about a surveillance mission. ♦ Germany nominated Michael Haneke's "The White Ribbon" (Dec. 30), about repressive religious practices in a rural village in 1913. ♦ The French drama "A Prophet" (Feb. 29), directed by Jacques Audiard, stars Tahar Rahim, as a young man who is sent to prison and becomes a hardened criminal.

ACTION!
James Cameron's 3-D science-fiction extravaganza "Avatar" (Dec. 18), centered on a war between humans and aliens, stars Sigourney Weaver, Sam Worthington, Michelle Rodriguez, Zoe Saldana, and Giovanni Ribisi. ♦ Martin Scorsese returns with "Shutter Island" (Feb. 19), set in 1954, about a pair of U.S. marshals (Leonardo DiCaprio and Mark Ruffalo) who seek an escaped murderer (Emily Mortimer) at a hospital for the criminally insane. ♦ Paul Greengrass directed "Green Zone" (March 12), about a C.I.A. agent (Matt Damon) who goes it alone in Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction.

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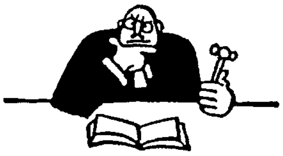
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

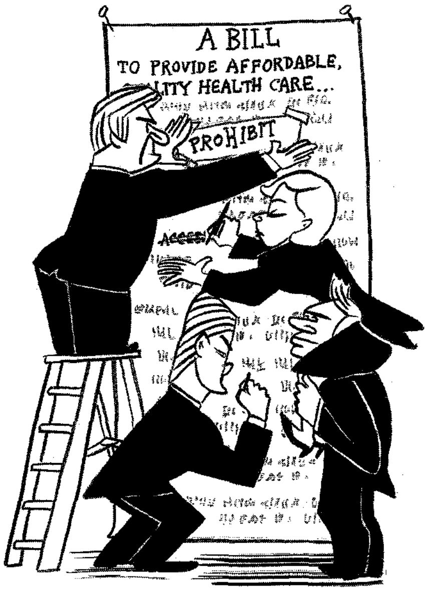
COMMENT
NOT COVERED



Abortion is almost as old as childbirth. There has always been a need for some women to end their pregnancies. In modern times, the law's attitude toward that need has varied. In the United States, at the time the Constitution was adopted, abortions before "quickening" were both legal and commonplace, often performed by midwives. In the nineteenth century, under the influence of the ascendant medical profession, which opposed abortion (and wanted to control health care), states began to outlaw the procedure, and by the turn of the twentieth century it was all but uniformly illegal. The rise of the feminist movement led to widespread efforts to decriminalize abortion, and in 1973 the Supreme Court found, in Roe v. Wade, that the Constitution prohibited the states from outlawing it.

Throughout this long legal history, the one constant has been that women have continued to have abortions. The rate has declined slightly in recent years, but, according to the Guttmacher Institute, thirty-five per cent of all women of reproductive age in America today will have had an abortion by the time they are forty-five. It might be assumed that such a common procedure would be included in a nation's plan to protect the health of its citizens. In fact, the story of abortion during the past decade has been its separation from other medical services available to women. Abortion, as the academics like to say, is being marginalized.

The latest evidence comes from the House of Representatives, which two weekends ago narrowly passed its health-care bill, by a vote of 220 to 215. One reason that the Democrats won back control of Congress is that the Party adopted a "big tent" philosophy on abortion. The implications of that approach became clear when, during the health-care vote, the House considered a last-minute amendment by Bart Stupak, a Michigan Democrat, which proposed scrubbing the bill of government subsidies for abortion procedures. It passed 240 to 194, with sixty-four Democrats voting in favor.



A clear understanding of the structure of the health-care proposals currently under consideration shows why the Stupak amendment is such a threat to abortion rights. At the heart of the proposals is the idea of an exchange, where consumers will be able to select among competing insurance plans. Theoretically, the exchange will increase consumer choice, promote competition, and (somewhat more theoretically) lower costs for everyone. If there is a public option, it will be offered through the exchange. At first, many of the people using the exchange will be those who are unable to pay for health insurance on their own. For them, the government will offer a sliding scale of subsidies. It is largely these subsidies which will increase the availability of insurance; estimates of how many people will gain coverage vary, but it may be close to forty million.

Restrictions on the use of federal funds for abortion go back to the Hyde amendment, which became law more than thirty years ago; for example, there has long been a ban on abortions under Medicaid or in military hospitals. But the implications of the Stupak amendment are broader, because of the structure of the exchange. To start with, Stupak states that anyone who buys insurance with a government subsidy cannot choose a plan that covers abortion, even if that person receives only a small

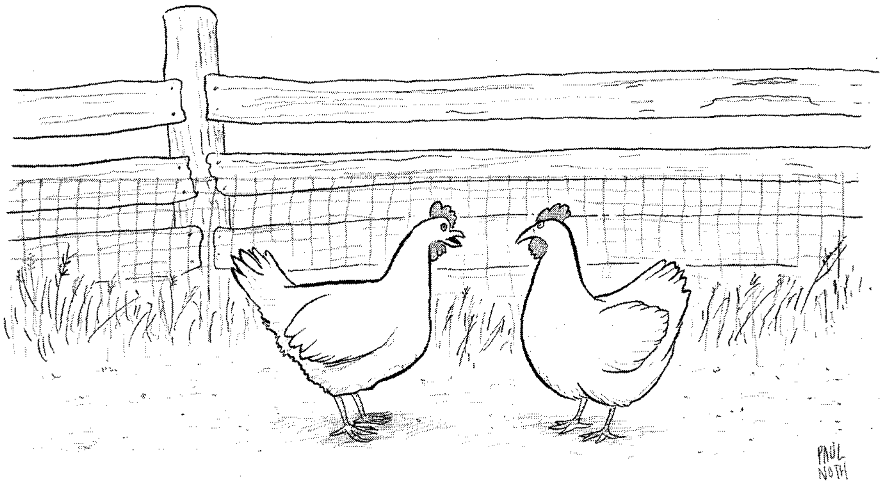
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

subsidy, and even if only a tiny portion of the full premium goes for abortion care. And the influence of the amendment reaches beyond the recipients of federal subsidies. Stupak would prohibit the public option from offering any plans that cover abortion. Further, it is expected that each year more Americans will use the exchange, including people who don't need subsidies, but under the Stupak amendment insurance companies would have no incentive to offer those people coverage for abortion services, since doing so might cost them the business of subsidized customers. Today, most policies cover abortion; in a post-Stupak world, they probably won't. With a health-care plan that is supposed to increase access and lower costs, the opposite would be true with respect to abortion. And that, of course, is what legislators like Stupak want—to make abortions harder, and more expensive, to obtain. Stupak and his allies were willing to kill the whole bill to get their way; the liberals in the House were not.

It may be that the endurance of Roe and Democratic control of the federal government have led to a certain complacency among abortion-rights supporters. Yet it's not only with regard to insurance that abortion services are being treated like a second-class form of medicine. There is, for instance, the proliferation of "conscience clauses," which allow medical professionals to refuse to conduct procedures that they disapprove of. Shortly after Roe, Congress passed the first major conscience clause, which stated that medical professionals and hospitals that receive certain federal funds did not have to provide abortions or sterilizations if they objected on "the basis of religious beliefs or moral convictions." The Bush Administration sought to dramatically expand the clauses to cover not only doctors and nurses but anyone who works in a hospital, including pharmacists, and to increase the range of practices that might be rejected—a step that could potentially include such services as the dispensing of birth control. President Obama has said that he will revise or overturn the policy.

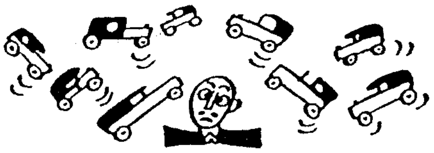
The President is pro-choice, and he has signalled some misgivings about the Stupak amendment. But, like many modern pro-choice Democrats, he has worked so hard to be respectful of his opponents on this issue that he sometimes seems to cede them the moral high ground. In his book "The Audacity of Hope," he describes the "undeniably difficult issue of abortion" and ponders "the middle-aged feminist who still mourns her abortion." Elsewhere, he announces, "Abortion vexes." The opponents of abortion aren't vexed—they are mobilized, focussed, and driven to succeed. The Catholic bishops took the lead in pushing for the Stupak amendment, and they squeezed legislators in a way that would do any K Street lobbyist proud. (One never sees that kind of effort on behalf of other aspects of Catholic teaching, like opposition to the death penalty.) Meanwhile, the pro-choice forces temporized. But, as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg observed not long ago, abortion rights "center on a woman's autonomy to determine her life's course, and thus to enjoy equal citizenship stature." Every diminishment of that right diminishes women. With stakes of such magnitude, it is wise to weigh carefully the difference between compromise and surrender.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*



"History's greatest monster: General Tso or Colonel Sanders?"

FOOL'S GOLD BY THE NUMBERS



The design for the new license plates unveiled last week in Albany has been given a name, Empire Gold, that seems especially fitting in light of the record budget deficit projected for the state, and the record highs in the price of gold—a magic recessionary solution. The sale of the plates, at twenty-five dollars apiece, was intended to alleviate the budget shortfall, under the guise of improving safety: as old license plates lose their reflective sheen, police are said to have a harder time reading the digits. Graphic designers at the D.M.V. have done away with the frills—the skyline, the Adirondacks, and Niagara Falls—and proposed replacing the current white background with a solid bar of gold that could pass for Mets or Islanders orange.

Your new plate, which is not meant to be optional, would come stamped with a new, randomly assigned sequence of seven letters and numbers—unless you've become so attached to your existing sequence, and the handy mnemonic device you use to remember it, that you're willing to pay an additional twenty bucks to roll it over onto Empire Gold. In this age of tea parties and Sean Hannity, however, citizens have become adept at spotting surreptitious forms of taxation, and, in Republican districts upstate, clerks like Frank Merola, of Rensselaer County, are staging a revolt, collecting thousands of signatures in opposition to the move, and starting Web sites like Nonewplates.com and Stopnewplates.com.

"I'm in Troy, and I often give out special county-clerk plates that start with 'TR' or 'TY,' which have local significance and are very easy to remember, instead of 'XYZ1257,' " Merola said the other day. "There's nothing wrong with the old plates. Most cars are in far worse shape than their plates." Part of the clerks' concerns is the anticipation of fielding angry calls from drivers who can no longer find their gray Volvos at the mall (A19—is that the row we parked in or the license plate?), or whose parking permits no longer square with their vehicle registrations. "It's almost insulting that they think it's O.K. as long as they dress it up in new colors," Merola said.

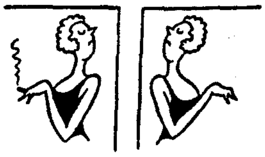
Could it be a coincidence that the Empire Gold color scheme calls to mind license plates introduced in New York during the seventies, another time when budgets were off course and precious metals were in demand? Gold, of course, is the nostalgist's perennial hedge against the proliferation of meaningless numbers and abstractions. With each passing year, more people require more area codes and Zip Codes and account numbers, and more gizmos for storing those numbers. The storage gadgets, in turn, ask for ever-more-complicated passwords and PINs, and the system expands outward until it threatens, on occasion, to break down—a memory brain freeze.

Memory, unlike gold, starts to deteriorate with time, and from lack of use. You may remember your childhood phone number, but, without the aid of speed dial, can you recall your child's? "We take for granted this highly repeated memory storage that allows us to function so well," Dr. Gary Small, the director of U.C.L.A.'s Memory and Aging Research Center, and the author of "iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind," said last week, after first asking if he could switch to another line and repeating his caller's number aloud, to exercise his frontal lobe. Small's license plate begins with the letters "YSL." "I think of Yves St. Laurent, so that helps," he said, and added, "Older people are better at seeing the big picture, but their memorization is slow."

The big picture: Albany still needs money. As of late last week, Governor Paterson appeared to be waffling over the license-plate scheme, appealing for new measures to increase revenues. Perhaps a free-market vanity-plate system (instead of fifty dollars for, say, LUVGOV) would work better? Last year, in Abu Dhabi, a man spent fourteen million dollars at a public auction for a license plate that had only one digit: "1." "I bought it because it's the best number," he said.

—*Ben McGrath*

THE PICTURES
METAMORPHOSIS

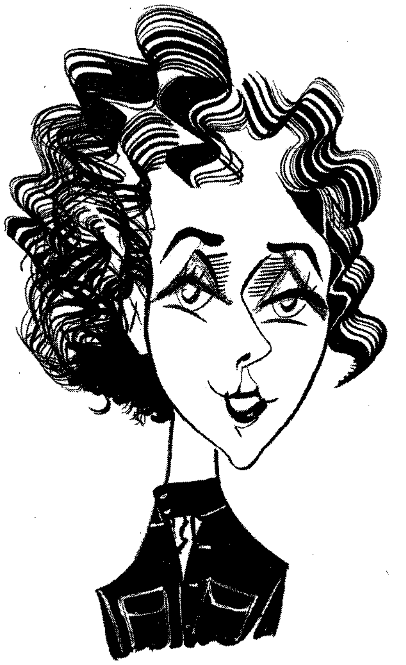


Pigeons rustled in the beams of the Staten Island Ferry terminal as Rebecca Miller, the writer and director, ordered a soft pretzel. This was a Tuesday afternoon, hazy, gray, quiet. Miller was in town for a number of reasons, one of which was to talk about "The Private Lives of Pippa Lee," a movie, based on her novel of the same name, which opens here this month. Miller wrote "Pippa"—which stars Alan Arkin, Keanu Reeves, Julianne Moore, Blake Lively, and Robin Wright Penn, as a woman in the throes of a metamorphosis—after running into an old friend in Rome. She recalled, "She had been a very wild girl in New York, and I saw her and she was this kind of very calm mother of several children. She had almost completely transformed herself—the way she dressed, her taste, her way of being in the world—yet she was the same person, and I thought, What happened?" Miller made her way to the ferry and sat on an orange bench. She was wearing a tab-collar jean jacket, cigarette pants with black piping from hip to ankle, and pink matte lipstick, a little smeared. Her bangs were mowed short. A foghorn bellowed, and the boat pushed off.

The private lives of Rebecca Miller began on September 15, 1962, in New York, where she was born to the playwright Arthur Miller and the photographer Inge Morath. Rebecca, a lone child in a household of complicated adults—her brother, Daniel, born four years later with Down syndrome, was placed in an institution—inhabited a solitary world of secret fears. Growing up in Roxbury, Connecticut, she had religious questions early. At bath time, she would lie in the tub and stare at the linen closet, which she thought housed a devil. Her grandmother lived with the family for a while. "She wasn't really self-absorbed, and it was great to have someone in the house like that," Miller recalled.

Second life: school. Miller was skinny; her best friend, a boy, was fat. There were three kids in the class. In first grade, her penny loafers fell apart, and she turned them into talking puppets—scuffed-sole mandibles and brown leather gums. Miller made friends with other misfits. "I had no social power," she said. "I ended up being one of the people who always sat in the library—the Brains."

Third life: Choate. "Boarding school taught me how to be devious, and I became a bad girl really quickly," she said. She crawled in and out of a lot of windows. "I didn't take hallucinogens, because I thought I would go mad," she recalled. Miller was suspended after letting a boy take both feet off the floor while sitting on her bed. A girl had told on her. "My God, she was a pariah after that," Miller said. "Social death."



Rebecca Miller

Fourth life: Yale. Naomi Wolf was her roommate. After graduation, Miller sailed to London on the Queen Elizabeth 2—she did aerobics, decks tilting, and a fellow-passenger pursued her to the point that, Miller recalled, "by the end of the thing I was considering a dinghy." She paused, stretching one of her curls, and then putting it in her mouth and sucking on it. "I had some interesting love affairs," she said. "I went off the rails a little bit later."

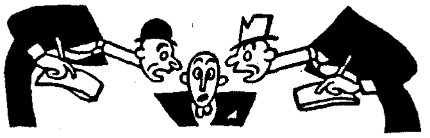
Fifth life: New York. Miller, a painter then, lived in Brooklyn, in "a little marriage" with her artist boyfriend. (They broke up.) Another boyfriend cooked for her. Miller asked him not to, because she didn't want to feel obligated to care for anyone else. She started to want to make films—the first one was of a double-headed crane, dipping in and out of two buckets of milk. In another, a woman gets up, goes to the dryer, and folds towels in the shape of a swaddled baby. She has given birth in a dream. Miller acted: a TV movie, a West German melodrama. "I knew I wasn't very good, and that was sort of a drag," she said. "My father thought I had lost my way."

Sixth life: Domesticity. Miller met Daniel Day-Lewis in 1996, at a screening of "The Crucible." They married that year. Soon, they had two children—Ronan and Cashel—with whom they live in County Wicklow, Ireland. For a while, they were in Florence, where Day-Lewis apprenticed with a cobbler. "I was so tired my left eye twitched for an entire year," Miller said. She continued, "Within family life, there's a moment that you feel you've lost yourself, that you stop being the protagonist in your own life. I have a friend who laughs at me because I'll have arrived back from taking the boys to school, and I'll be sitting at my desk, writing, in my parka."

The ferry was nudging its way past the Statue of Liberty. "Oh, *there* she is," Miller said. She surveyed the far bank of the Hudson, hands clasped on top of her pocketbook. "I like journeys that actually take a long time, because you feel like you've gone somewhere," she said.

—*Lauren Collins*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
THE JONESES



Marco Blaze, an actor who works exclusively for TitanMen, which calls itself "a pre-eminent producer of high-end gay adult content," couldn't make it. Sasha Grey, the fiercely self-possessed "existentialist, pornstar, and artist" (as her MySpace page puts it), submitted a brief videotaped speech. But Levi Johnston was there in person last Wednesday night, at the Box, a burlesque club on the Lower East Side. He was one of the honorees at the first annual Fleshbot Awards, named for the sexually inclusive pornographic blog that is part of the Gawker media group. Johnston had won a "porn crossover award," in recognition of his forthcoming appearance in *Playgirl.*

During last year's Presidential campaign, Johnston became instantly famous as the future son-in-law of the governor of Alaska and, for all we knew, a prospective inhabitant of the Vice-Presidential mansion. In the end, the mansion welcomed different tenants, and eventually the marriage was called off—and so, too, was the governorship. But Johnston has a son named Tripp, who is nearly a year old, which means that Johnston is the father of the grandchild of someone people care a lot about, which makes him, by the transitive property of celebrity, someone people care a little bit about.

And, because he has sometimes been willing to share details of the time he spent with his baby's mother and her family, he has emerged as a quasi-political figure in his own right, celebrated, if smirkingly, by people who view him as a good-looking thorn in the side of his son's famous grandmother. Last year, he was adduced as a walking example of family values (he was, after all, doing the right thing, although perhaps in the wrong order); this year, he is sometimes seen as a walking critique of them.

Johnston sat at a small table in the balcony of the Box, flanked by two immovable African-American men wearing suits. They were not bodyguards, or, in any case, not merely bodyguards. Tank Jones (pink tie) is Johnston's manager, agent, life coach, wardrobe consultant, whatever; Tank's brother, Marvin (black tie), is Johnston's personal trainer.

All three peered over the railing at a snippet from "Pirate's Booty," an all-male animated adventure (starring Captain Jack Swallows) that was named the year's sexiest computer-generated movie. Tank Jones explained that, once Johnston collected his award, they would be gone. "Like a fart in the wind," he said.

Intermission arrived. The Johnston crew headed outside to Chrystie Street. A few paparazzi materialized, and Jones issued ground rules for interviews. (No questions about Tripp's custody, which is now a matter of dispute, or about his grandmother.) Jones has met a lot of people who are surprised to see a black man from Alaska, but he has a simple explanation: "Anywhere you got military bases, you know you're going to have some black people."

He is—or was—a criminal investigator, and he found Johnston through his mother, who had, he says, "some criminal problems" last year. (She is now incarcerated, having pleaded guilty to a felony drug charge.) Jones asked Johnston if he needed help dealing with the media, and Johnston said that he didn't. Two weeks later, he changed his mind.

"It just didn't stop," Johnston said. "I had to do something."

So Jones went to work, in collaboration with a lawyer from Anchorage. "I told him, 'Look, put my number on your door. Anyone looking for you, they can call me.' That was a mistake." Jones's phone started ringing. Johnston did "The Tyra Banks Show," *GQ*, "Larry King Live," and numberless interviews; Jones says they turned down a record contract and more than one reality show.

The phone still rings all the time. "Right while we standing here now," Jones said, offering his smashed-up BlackBerry for inspection. "You see that crack in my phone? That's because I threw it up against the wall."

Back inside, Johnston posed for a picture with the determinedly ubiquitous socialite Tinsley Mortimer—accidental fame, side by side with its opposite. Soon, he ascended to accept his award (a stainless-steel objet d'art based on a fearsomely functional product known as the Eleven), and delivered a brief speech. "I'm honored to be here," he said. "Make sure y'all go and get that new *Playgirl* next week." The ceremony ended with its only transgressive moment: a riveting performance by the porn actress and director Belladonna, who demonstrated the flexibility of her legs and her larynx. But by that time Johnston and the Joneses were gone—carried away, no doubt, by the unceasing demands of do-it-yourself celebrity, and by the brisk November wind.

—*Kelefa Sanneh*

FOR THE NEW ENERGY FUTURE,
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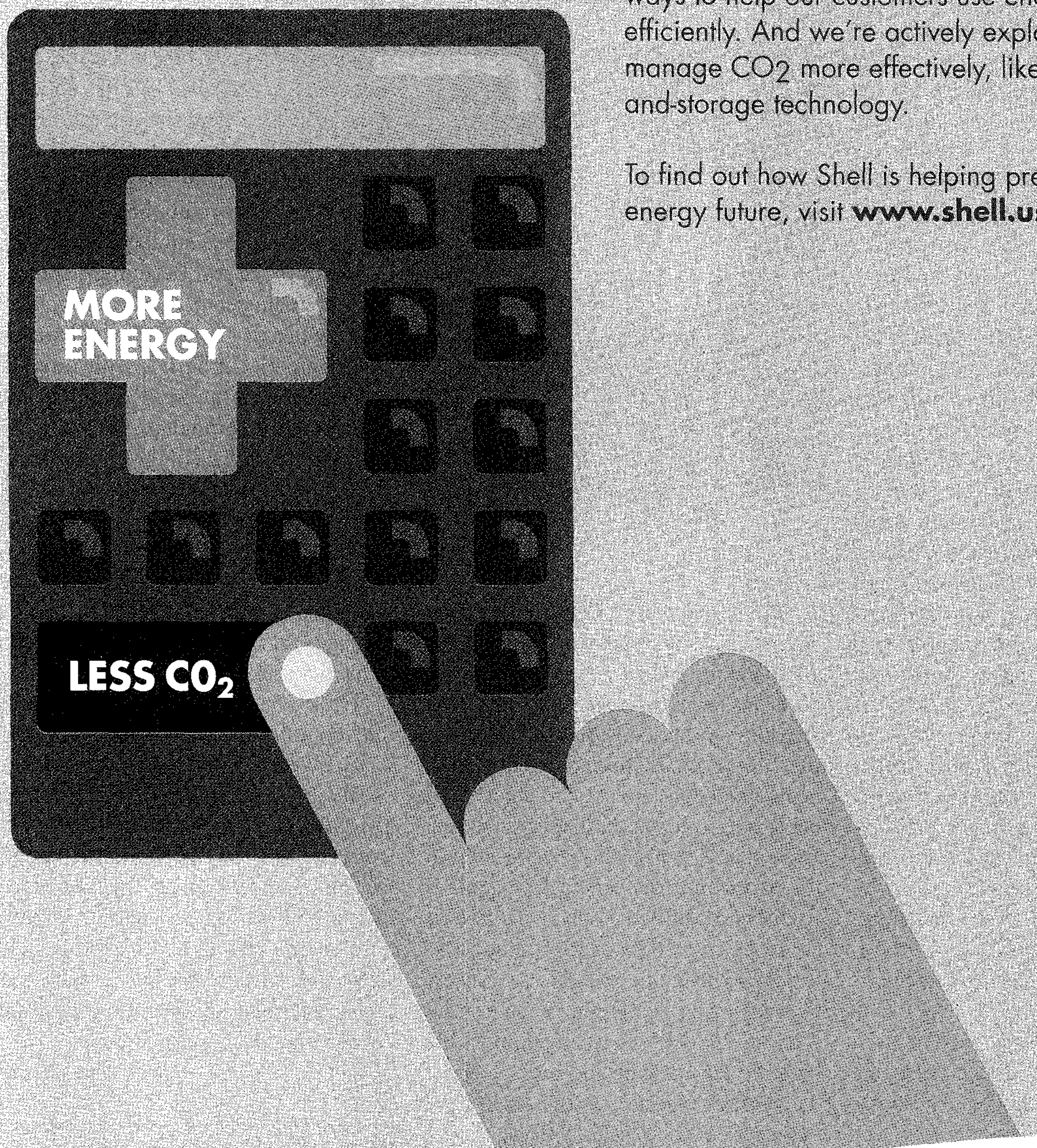

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE DEBT ECONOMY

John Kenneth Galbraith wrote that all financial crises are the result of "debt that, in one fashion or another, has become dangerously out of scale." The recent financial crisis was no exception, with everyone—homeowners, private-equity investors, our biggest banks—taking on enormous amounts of debt. If it's frustrating that the government is footing the bill to clean up the mess, it's even worse that the government helped pay for the debt binge that created the mess in the first place, thanks to a tax system that actually subsidizes borrowing. Debt didn't get dangerously out of scale because the system was broken. It got out of scale, in part, because the system worked.

The government doesn't make people go into debt, of course. It just nudges them in that direction. Individuals are able to write off all their mortgage interest, up to a million dollars, and companies can write off all the interest on their debt, but not things like dividend payments. This gives the system what economists call a "debt bias." It encourages people to make smaller down payments and to borrow more money than they otherwise would, and to tie up more of their wealth in housing than in other investments. Likewise, the system skews the decisions that companies make about how to fund themselves. Companies can raise money by reinvesting profits, raising equity (selling shares), or borrowing. But only when they borrow do they get the benefit of a "tax shield." Jason Furman, of the National Economic Council, has estimated that tax breaks make corporate debt as much as forty-two per cent cheaper than corporate equity. So it's not surprising that many companies prefer to pile on the leverage.

There are a couple of peculiar things about these tax breaks—which have been around as long as the federal income tax. The first is that they're unnecessary. Few people, after all, can save enough to buy a home with cash, so home buyers naturally gravitate toward mortgages. And businesses like debt because it offers them tremendous leverage, making it possible to put down a little money and potentially reap a huge gain. Even in the absence of the deductions, then, there would be plenty of borrowing. The second thing about these breaks is that their social benefits are pretty much nonexistent. Advocates of the mortgage-interest deduction, for instance, claim that it increases homeownership rates. But it doesn't: in countries where mortgage deductions have been eliminated, homeownership rates haven't dropped. Instead, the deduction simply inflates house prices. The business-interest deduction, meanwhile, may lower an individual company's taxes, but it also means that the over-all corporate tax rate is higher, so its real impact is to give companies with lots of debt an unjustified advantage.

If the benefits are illusory, the costs are all too real. Economies work best, generally speaking, when people are making decisions based on economic fundamentals, not on tax considerations. So, as much as possible, the tax system should be neutral between debt and equity, and between housing and other investments. It's not, and, worse still, as we've seen in the past couple of years, debt magnifies risk: if companies or individuals rely on large amounts of leverage, it's much easier for bad decisions to lead to insolvency, with significant ripple effects in the wider economy. A debt-ridden economy is inherently more fragile and more volatile. This doesn't mean that the tax system caused the financial crisis; after all, the tax breaks have been around for a long time, and the crisis is new. But, as a recent I.M.F. study found, tax distortions likely made the total amount of debt that people and companies took on much bigger. And that made the bursting of the housing bubble especially damaging. So encouraging people to take on debt qualifies as a genuinely bad idea.

But it's not an easy situation to change. In 2005, a special Presidential panel on tax reform actually proposed eliminating the business-interest deduction and severely restricting mortgage-interest tax breaks. Those proposals, predictably, went nowhere. But we're in a different historical moment now: the perils of too much borrowing have never been clearer. And there are precedents, on a smaller scale, for these kinds of changes. In the U.S., people used to be able to write off the interest they paid on credit cards. That tax break was abolished in 1986, and, the same year, the mortgage-interest deduction, which used to be unlimited, was capped. Great Britain, meanwhile, abolished its mortgage tax break in 2000. Similarly, there are a number of countries, including Brazil and Belgium, that don't give corporate debt a tax advantage over equity, while, just last year, both Germany and Denmark cut back sharply on their business-interest tax breaks, limiting how much interest companies can write off. Given the weak state of the economy and of housing prices, a wholesale rewriting of the tax code may be a bridge too far right now, but there are plenty of reforms—capping deductions, phasing them out over time, restricting their use by heavily leveraged companies—that would move in the right direction.

The clearest hurdle to these changes may be political, but the bigger hurdle is, in a way, psychological: because tax breaks on debt have been around so long, we can hardly imagine what it would be like if we changed them, and we tend to underestimate their influence in shaping our behavior. Subsidizing debt seems harmless simply because we've always done it. But the fact that you've had a bad habit for a long time doesn't make it less dangerous.

—*James Surowiecki*

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James Surowiecki's notes for this column.

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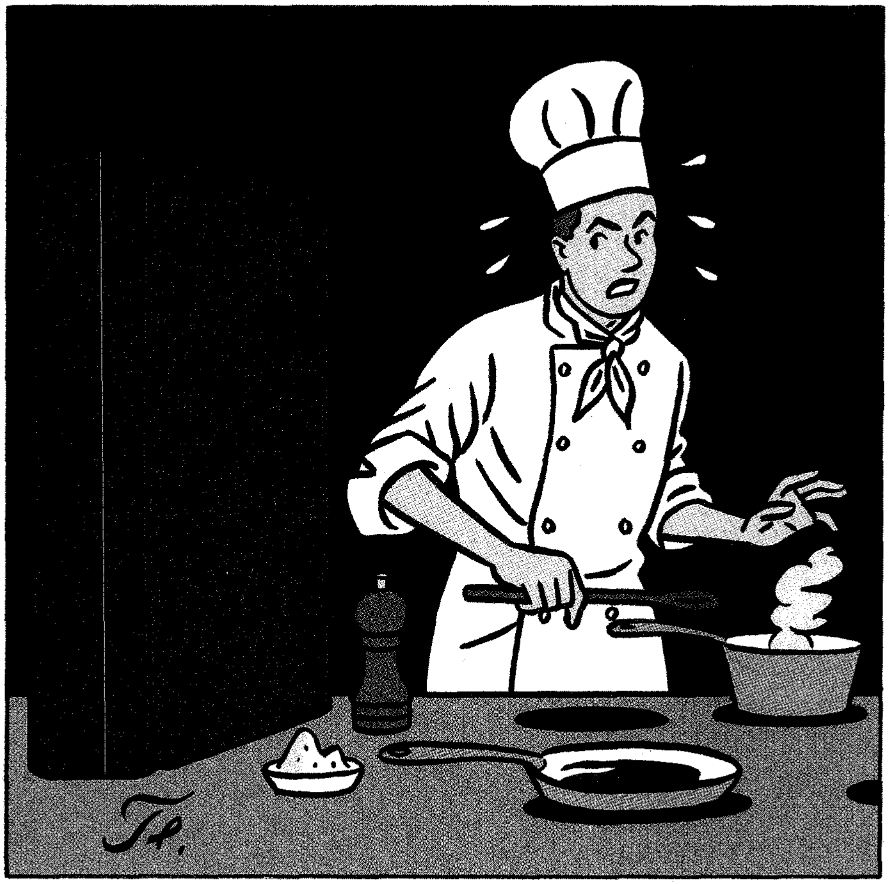
OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

LUNCH WITH M.

Undercover with a Michelin inspector.

BY JOHN COLAPINTO



"Was every single element prepared exactly perfectly, technically correct?" M. asked.

FLOC'H

One afternoon last month, a woman in her early thirties, with shoulder-length blond hair and large brown eyes, arrived at Jean Georges, on the ground floor of the Trump International Hotel, in midtown Manhattan. The restaurant, which is owned by the chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and is one of the highest rated in the world, has an understated décor, with bare white walls and floor-to-ceiling windows. The woman took a seat at one of the tables in the center of the room. She wore a light-blue dress with a high neckline, little makeup, and no jewelry. There was nothing remarkable about her appearance, and her demeanor was quiet and unassuming, as if designed to deflect attention—a trait indispensable for her profession as an inspector for the Michelin hotel-and-restaurant guide.

Conceived in France at the beginning of the last century, the Michelin guide today has editions in twenty-three countries and is one of the best-selling restaurant guides in the world. It operates on the principle that only reviews by anonymous, professionally trained experts can be trusted for accurate assessments of a restaurant's food and service. Major newspapers like the *Times* aspire to anonymity for their restaurant reviewers but rarely achieve it. In his recent memoir, "Born Round," Frank Bruni, who served as the *Times'* restaurant reviewer from 2004 until earlier this year, describes his efforts at camouflage—using aliases, wearing a wig and fake mustache—which were mostly futile once the dust-jacket photograph from one of his early books was posted on the Internet. Photographs of Bruni's successor, Sam Sifton, doctored in several ways to suggest what he might look like in disguise, began to circulate on foodie Web sites like Eater months before he took up his duties.

Michelin has gone to extraordinary lengths to maintain the anonymity of its inspectors. Many of the company's top executives have never met an inspector; inspectors themselves are advised not to disclose their line of work, even to their parents (who might be tempted to boast about it); and, in all the years that it has been putting out the guide, Michelin has refused to allow its inspectors to speak to journalists. The inspectors write reports that are distilled, in annual "stars meetings" at the guide's various national offices, into the ranking of three stars, two stars, or one star—or no stars. (Establishments that Michelin deems unworthy of a visit are not included in the guide.) A three-star Michelin ranking—like that enjoyed by Jean Georges—is exceedingly rare. Only twenty-six three-star restaurants exist in France, and only eighty-one in the world.

In 2005, Michelin launched its first foray into North America, with the publication of the 2006 New York City guide. (It has also published guides to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and San Francisco.) Since coming to America, Michelin has learned that its brand of Gallic opacity and unapologetic gastronomic élitism has been a tougher sell here than it was in Europe or Asia. (The Tokyo edition of the guide, which débuted in 2007, sold more than a hundred thousand copies on its first day.) Five years after its arrival in New York City, Michelin has failed to knock the *Times* from its perch as the premier arbiter of restaurants in the city, or to outsell the Zagat guide, which relies on customer surveys for its restaurant rankings.

This fall, in an effort to promote what the managing director of the guides, a forty-eight-year-old Frenchman named Jean-Luc Naret, calls a "better understanding" of the guides' means and methods, Michelin launched a Web site, Famously Anonymous, to explain to Americans the concept of the Michelin inspector; it has also recently opened Twitter accounts for its reviewers. But by far the most salient sign of Michelin's new openness was its decision, this fall, to allow me to meet—and to eat with—

one of its New York-based inspectors.

Naret joined me and the inspector for lunch. He has a handsome, darkly tanned face, and favors designer suits with flared-collar shirts and no tie. Although the inspector was never identified to the staff, Naret, who eats often at Jean Georges and is well-known to the restaurant’s staff, considered her anonymity compromised; she would never pay an inspection visit to the restaurant again. As a precondition of our interview, I was told that certain details of the inspector’s personal life would be obscured—or not divulged to me at all. When I asked her name, the inspector laughed nervously. “No,” she said. “Let’s not even say it. Make something up.”

I suggested the first thing that came to mind. “Maxime?”

Naret smiled, and then, with a soupçon of extra secrecy, began referring to her as M.

Maxime is a New Yorker. She said that speaking to me about her work felt “surreal.” “We spend all our time not letting people know who we are,” she said, but admitted that she had told her husband what she does for a living. “He’s an attorney; he knows all about confidentiality.” For most others, she keeps her occupation vague. “We try not to lie,” she said. “You say you’re ‘in publishing,’ something like that.”

The waiter, a young man in a dark suit, handed us menus. I asked Maxime how she chooses what to order.

“You’re looking for something that really tests a number of quality ingredients and then something that’s a little complex, because you want to see what the kitchen can do,” she said. “We would never order something like a salad. We rarely order soup.” She decided to try the foie-gras brûlée, “although I usually avoid it, because of the calories.”

Maxime eats out more than two hundred days of the year, lunch and dinner. She eats the maximum number of courses offered—at Jean Georges, we were having three courses, plus dessert; that way, she said, “you really get to see the most food”—and she is required to eat everything on her plate. It is a regimen that calls to mind the force-feeding of the ducks that supply Vongerichten with his velvety foie gras, but Maxime, blessed with a quick metabolism, had managed to avoid obesity, an occupational hazard.

She was tending toward the Arctic char for her main course but couldn’t decide about her second course. The waiter reappeared and asked if he could answer any questions.

“Can you tell me about the crab toast?” she asked.

“It’s Peekytoe crab, a chiffonade of tarragon as well as chives topped with white sesame seeds, toasted in the oven, finished with a miso mustard, and a pear salad on the side,” he said.

“It’s new?” she said.

“About a week on the menu.”

She asked the waiter to give her a minute and then leaned in to me. Inspectors love it when they ask a question and can tell that a waiter has made up an answer, she explained, adding, “That never happens here.”

The original *Guide Michelin* was developed by André Michelin, an engineer, and his younger brother, Édouard. Born into a wealthy manufacturing family in Clermont-Ferrand, the brothers, in 1895, presented a new design for a pneumatic tire for cars. Automobiles were still a rarity on roads in France. The brothers had the idea that a guidebook to hotels in the French countryside would encourage people to climb into a car (equipped with Michelin tires) and hit the open road. The first edition, published in 1900, was a five-hundred-and-seventy-five-page alphabetical listing of towns throughout France and the distances between them, with recommendations for hotels and places to refuel, and instructions on how to change a flat. In a preface to the first edition, André wrote, “This work comes out with the century; it will last as long.” In 1933, the Michelin brothers introduced the first countrywide restaurant listings and unveiled the star system for ranking food, with one star denoting “a very good restaurant in its class”; two stars “excellent cooking, worth a detour”; and three stars “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey.”

Over the years, other publications attempted to challenge Michelin but without success. To offset the expense of sending inspectors to restaurants across the country, rival guides were obliged to accept free meals, or to offer favors, like free advertising in the guides’ pages. Michelin’s inspectors faced no such quid pro quo. A century after André and Éd-

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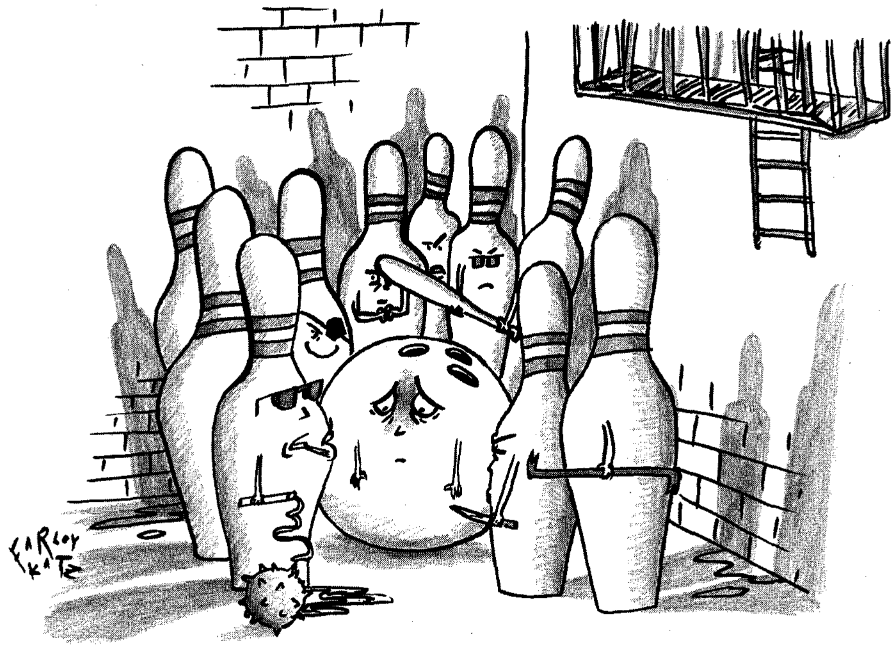

"Payback time."

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ouard created their first tire patent, Michelin has grown into one of the most successful multinational corporations in the world, a company more than three times the size of Goodyear. Michelin's profits help to defray the costs of food inspectors' salaries, travel budgets, and restaurant bills (which can run into real money at the upper end of the gastronomic scale: six years ago, at Bernard Loiseau's La Côte d'Or, a three-star restaurant in Burgundy, the chicken stuffed with carrots, leeks, and truffles was two hundred and sixty-seven dollars). This independence, coupled with the jealously guarded anonymity of its inspectors, is what gives Michelin its aura of incorruptibility. The French chef Paul Bocuse, who helped create nouvelle cuisine in the nineteen-sixties, and whose restaurant near Lyons has held a three-star Michelin ranking for a record forty-five years, has said, "Michelin is the only guide that counts." Indeed, in France publication of the guide each year sparks the kind of media excitement attendant on the Academy Awards. The days and weeks leading up to publication day are given over to endless debate, speculation, and rumor on TV and in newspapers over who might lose, and who might gain, a star. The results, revealed in early March, provide either a very public triumph or a very public humiliation for the chefs concerned, and a corresponding rise or drop in revenues for their restaurants.

Not everyone, however, is convinced that anonymous experts with bottomless expense accounts are the key to a dependable restaurant guide. "We're coming at it from a completely different perspective," says Nina Zagat, who dreamed up the idea of a customer-driven food survey with her husband, Tim, in their Upper West Side apartment thirty-one years ago. Today, Zagat covers more than ninety cities worldwide, is available as an iPhone app, and remains the top-selling restaurant guide in New York. "We've never believed that there were experts that should tell you what to do."

"I'd love to know what their training is," Tim Zagat added, speaking about Michelin's inspectors. "Usually, the experts—for example, the major critics for the major papers—you know what their background is. But this business of making a virtue out of *not* knowing? I question it. How are you supposed to judge their expertise if you don't have any idea who they are?"

Bernard Loiseau, the chef and owner of La Côte d'Or, once told a fellow-chef that if he ever lost one of his Michelin stars he would kill himself. Loiseau had made a life's ambition of becoming a three-star chef, a goal he achieved in 1991, seventeen years after arriving at La Côte d'Or. His ranking led to a line of frozen food bearing his name and likeness, and the Legion of Honor, awarded by President François Mitterrand. But by 2002 Loiseau's classic cooking was losing ground to trendier fusion styles, business was slowing, and he was swimming in debt. As Rudolph Chelminski relates in his 2005 book "The Perfectionist," the food writer François Simon published a story in *Le Figaro* hinting that Loiseau was on thin ice with Michelin. Loiseau, who had suffered periodic depression for years, sank into despair. In early February, 2003, he was notified by Michelin that he would keep his third star. Still, Simon wrote another piece, in which he suggested that Loiseau and his third star were "living on borrowed time." Two and a half weeks later, after a day at work in the kitchen, Loiseau killed himself with a shotgun blast to the head. He was fifty-two.

Loiseau's death ushered in a dark period for the guide. In early 2004, an inspector named Pascal Rémy broke the company's code of silence when he published a book based on a diary that he had kept of fifteen years on the road as a Michelin inspector in France. (Rémy, having notified Michelin of his plans to publish, was fired; he later sued.) Rémy's book, "L'Inspecteur Se Met à Table" ("The Inspector Sits Down at the Table"), described the inspector's life as one of loneliness and underpaid drudgery, driving around the French countryside for weeks on end, dining alone and under intense pressure to file reports. Michelin had always hinted that it employed roughly a hundred inspectors to cover Europe, but Rémy claimed that it employed only eleven within France when he was first hired, in 1988—a number that had shrunk to five by the time he left, in 2003. Contrary to Michelin's assertion that every starred restaurant was revisited several times a year, Rémy said only one visit every few years was possible. Furthermore, he wrote, the guide played favorites—most notably with Bocuse, whose restaurant in Lyons was known, according to Rémy, to have declined drastically in quality yet continued to hold three stars. Rémy's revelations made the front page of *Le Monde.* Derek Brown, the director of the guides at the time, denied Rémy's assertions in an interview in the *Times*, but he remained vague

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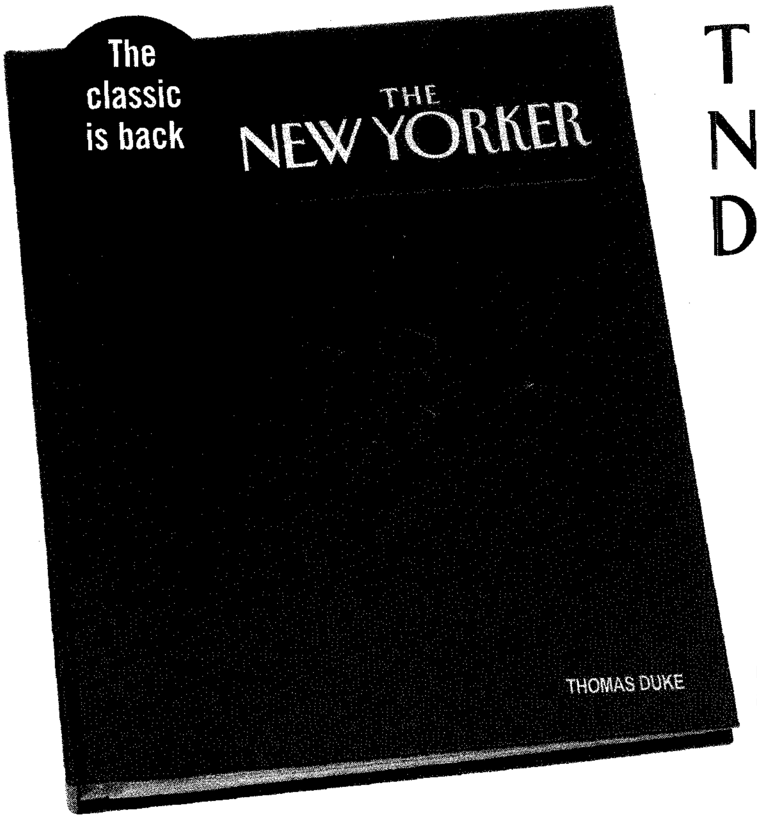
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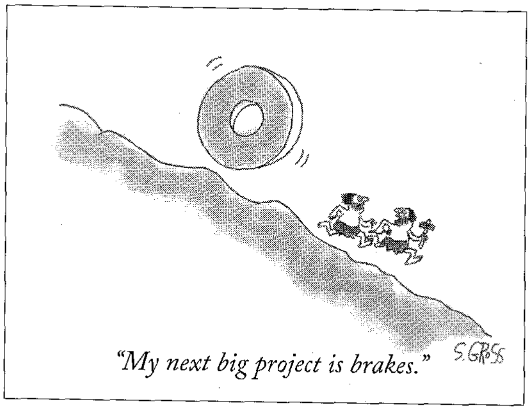

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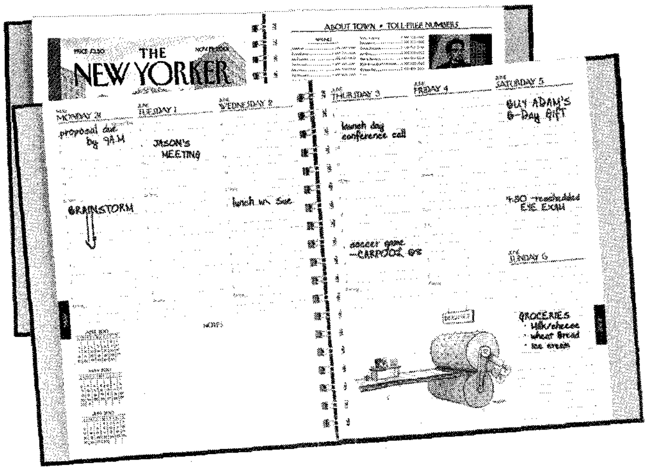
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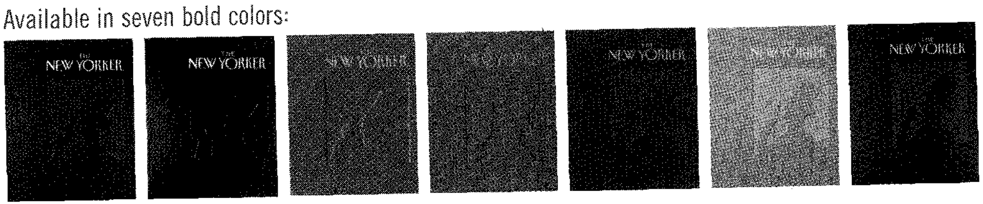
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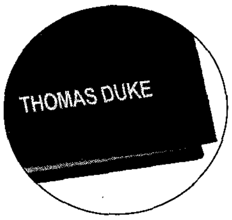
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about how many full-time inspectors the guide employs in France and offered an anemic rebuttal to Rémy's claim that certain three-star chefs were untouchable: "There would be little sense in saying a restaurant was worth three stars if it weren't true, if for no other reason than that the customer would write and tell us."

The Rémy affair occurred during Brown's final year at the guide. As his successor, Michelin hired the charismatic and outgoing Naret, who worked for many years as a hotelier, but whose professional focus has not been food. He boasts of giving more than two thousand interviews a year, in which he tells journalists how many inspectors Michelin employs in France (about fifteen), throughout the world (ninety), and in the United States (ten).

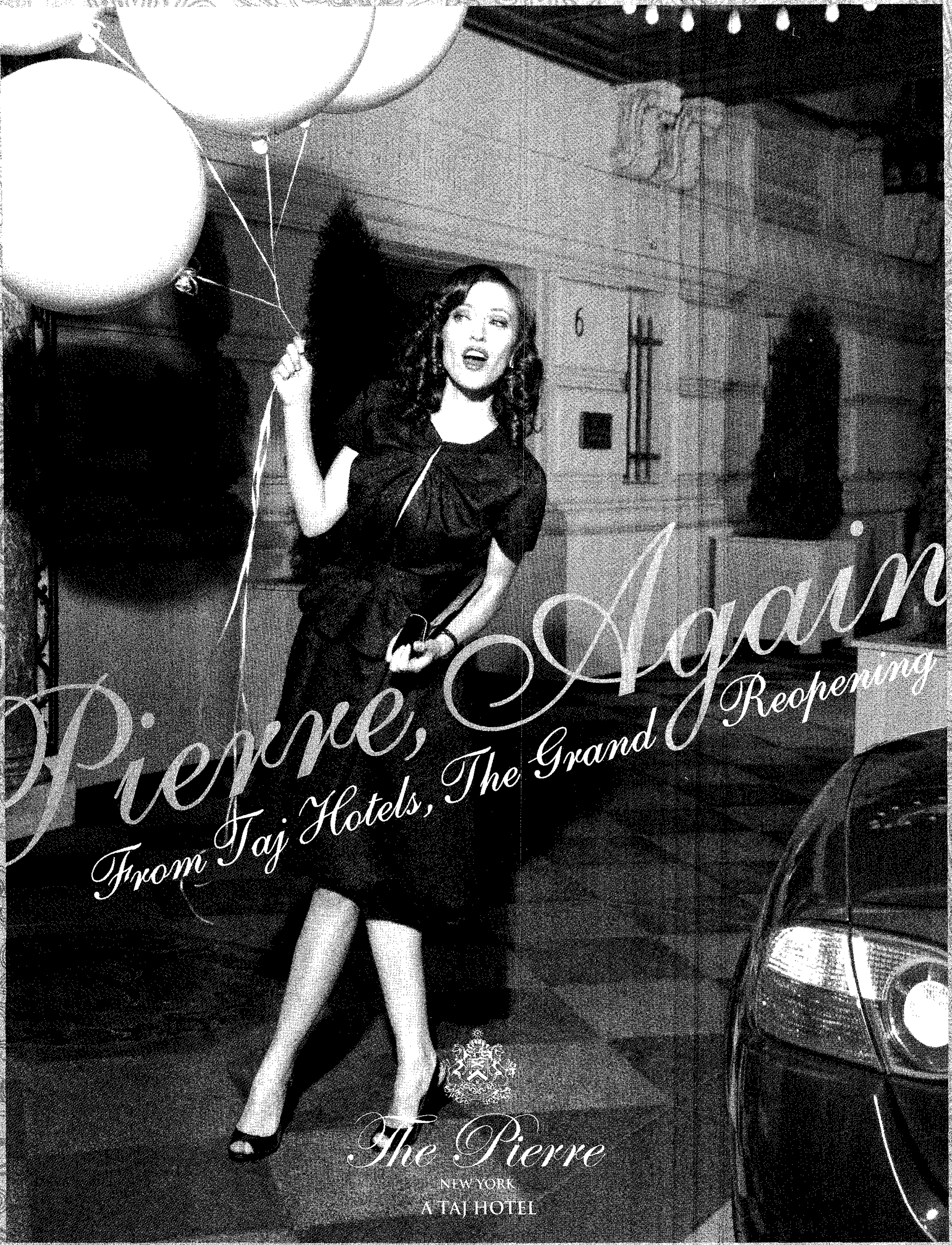
Naret introduced the idea of expanding into North America and chose New York City as the best place to start. The first New York City guide, which appeared in November, 2005, was created by a team of five European inspectors, who examined fifteen hundred restaurants in all five boroughs, and selected five hundred for inclusion. Their selection was criticized, by some, as Francocentric. The *Times* noted that more than half the restaurants that received at least two stars "could be considered French." Among the one-star restaurants was the now defunct La Goulue, which one highly regarded New York food critic describes as "this *dinosaur* of an outdated, mediocre kind of French bistro on the Upper East Side." And the 2006 guide failed to award stars to Eleven Madison Park (Danny Meyer's haute-cuisine restaurant), Craft (the "Top Chef" head judge Tom Colicchio's take on contemporary American food), "or any number of celebrated restaurants," the critic adds. "It was one of those things, like, only a bunch of French people could respond that way."

Naret, who says that he never intended to continue to use European teams, established an office in New York for the next year's guide and began recruiting New Yorkers. He received thirty-five hundred applications.

Though born in New York City, Maxime moved with her family to a nearby "rural countryside" town, which, she says, has "an extraordinarily active foodie community." Maxime's family was discerning about food, and came into the city frequently to sample the restaurants. "I ate falafel at Mamoun's and bagels and lox from Russ & Daughters before I'd even heard of a peanut-butter sandwich," she said. The family also travelled abroad, and she learned early about the Michelin guide. "Other kids wanted a Barbie or something. I wanted to go to a three-star restaurant in Paris." Maxime's fascination with food was not confined to haute cuisine. "It's a global food passion," as she put it. Big Macs, tacos from "these divey little delis in Sunset Park," Chinese food from "a Szechuan restaurant that's a total dump," even hot dogs from Papaya King's grimy corner kiosks in Manhattan elicit groans of pleasure: "Oh, *fantastic* hot dogs!"

Linda Bartoshuk, a professor of community dentistry and behavioral science at the University of Florida, has for more than three decades done research into genetic variations in the perception of taste. Through studies of the disposition and the density of taste buds on the tongues of test subjects, Bartoshuk has divided people into three categories: supertasters, tasters, and non-tasters. Most food and wine experts would fall into the "taster" category. (Supertasters, despite their name, have too many taste buds and are thus oversensitive to flavor, and tend to prefer bland foods; non-tasters can eat an exquisite risotto and say, "Eh.") I asked Maxime if she believed that she had some biological advantage when it came to tasting and discerning flavors. "You could argue that the inspectors have some biological makeup, or you could argue that they eat so much that they have the grounds for comparison," she said. "And they have their training, the professional training."

A degree in hospitality, hotel management, or cooking is mandatory for Michelin inspectors. Every job that Maxime held, from high school on, had been in the domestic food, wine, or restaurant industry. She got a master's from N.Y.U. in food studies, and obtained a sommelier's certification. Six years ago, she was working in a food-and-hospitality job in a city far from New York when she learned that Michelin was recruiting inspectors to produce a New York City guide. "I immediately started stalking Jean-Luc," she said. She had several preliminary interviews in New York, during which she was warned about the rigors of life as an inspector—the travel, the regimen of constant eating, the pressure to fill out meticulously de-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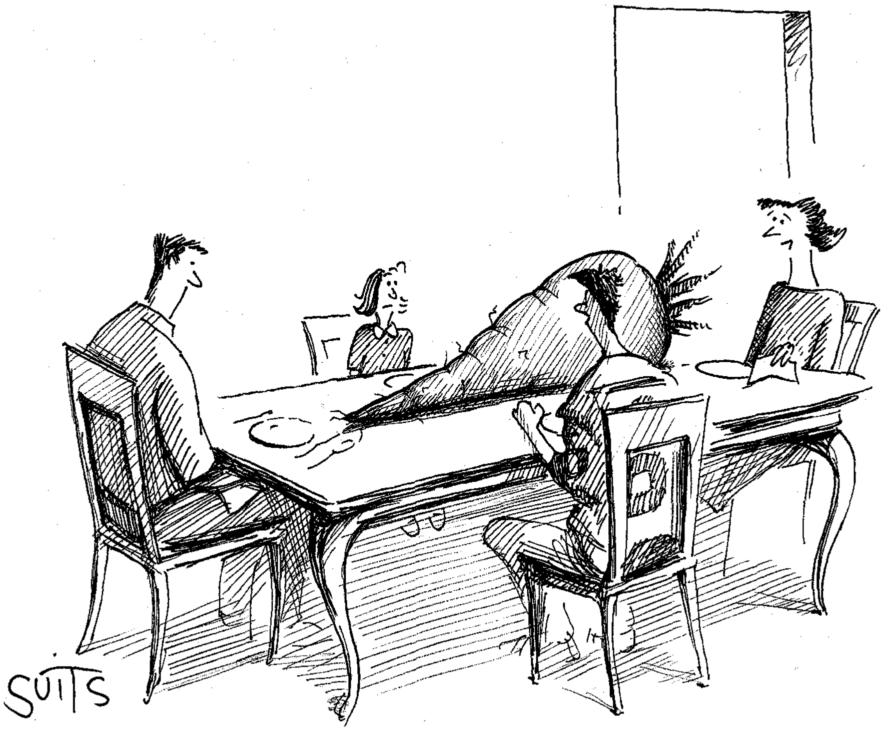
tailed reports on time, the enforced anonymity, the low pay. ("Let's just say it's not about the money," she said.)

"The interview process is a bit like trying to scare you off," she went on. "You really have to be committed. It's your life. It's not like a nine-to-five job." Nor is it all about three-star dining. "The stars are only ten per cent of the selection," she said. "The vast majority of the time, we're hiking around the Upper East Side, we're eating at neighborhood restaurants, we're hiking around Brooklyn." Assigned specific areas of the city to cover, Maxime, who lives in Manhattan, spends weeks riding the subway out to the farthest reaches of Queens to make her way through a selection of Thai restaurants, eating two meals a day, every day, and she typically eats alone, since talking with a spouse or friend is frowned upon.

After making the first cut, she was obliged to order and eat a series of dinners in New York restaurants under the scrutiny of seasoned European inspectors. "You don't know what you're doing, so you're, like, What do I pick? What do I eat? And then they show you the wine list to see what wine you choose." After the meal, she was required to write a paper analyzing the experience, while an inspector looked on. "And then there's also the kind of covert-ops part," she said. "You never know the name of the person you're meeting, you never know where they're meeting you until right before, so they call you up and say 'Meet me at the corner of XYZ and XYZ.'"

All candidates are flown to France to take part in the Michelin training program. "You've got to go to the mother ship to understand the origins of the system," she said. The fundamentals include not only the star rankings but also the *couverts:* the crossed-knife-and-spoon icons used to rank the ambience, comfort, and service of a given restaurant. The *couverts* range from one to four, in ascending order of quality, and they can be in black or red ink. (Red ink denotes exceptional service and décor.) After their time in France, trainees receive additional instruction in another European country. Maxime was sent to England, where, she says, she contracted her only bout of food poisoning, from a pork-belly dish.

When she returned to New York, she was required to apprentice under one of the European inspectors. "There's no point in sending you off on your own if you're going to come back and say, 'I don't know if it's a two-*couvert* or a three-*couvert*' or 'Oh, I thought it was a star'"—only to have the senior inspector go back to the restaurant and discover that the food is, as she put it, "junk." This period of apprenticeship generally lasts three to six months, but at any point an applicant can be told that he or she is not working out.



"It helps if you think of it as a turkey."

The waiter arrived and placed before Maxime a large white plate. At the center was her foie gras, a short pillar of puréed duck liver on a piece of crisp toast with a lacy web of caramelized sugar on top; the sides were studded with cherries and sprinkled with pistachios, and a transparent sauce, made of white port gelée, surrounded the entire creation like a moat. She considered the dish for a few moments, as if trying to determine the best angle of attack. With the side of her fork, she broke off a piece of the complicated construction, and tasted it. The dish, which I later tried, activated every sense with which humans are equipped: the foie gras was smooth and as rich as butter, its silky texture contrasting with the caramelized sugar, which shattered like a pane of microscopically thin glass against the teeth and tongue, its sweetness offset by the sour cherries, the rounded aromatic flavor of the toasted nuts, and the texture and taste of the port gelée.

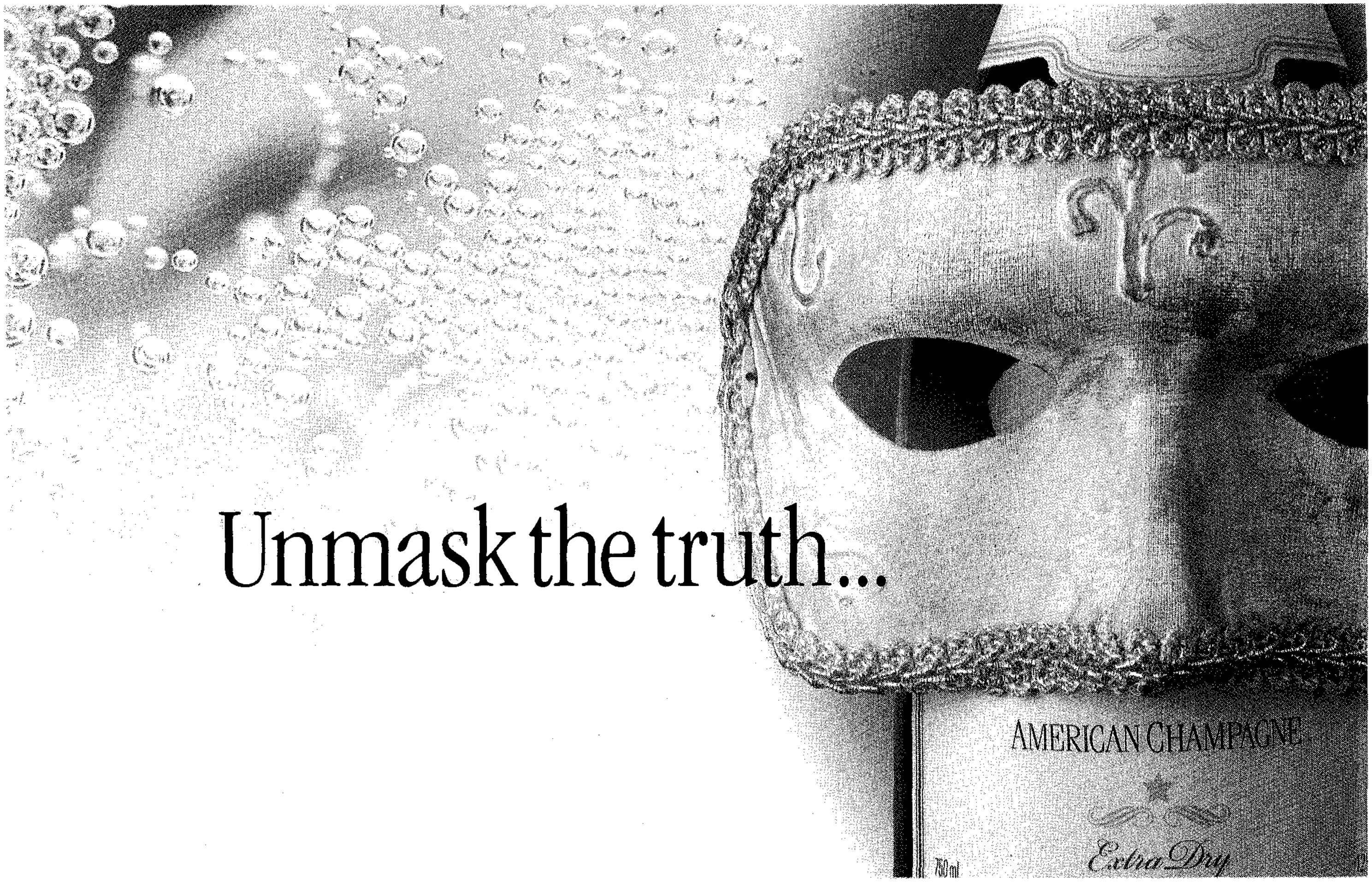
"Excellent," Maxime said.

I asked her what she liked about it.

"It's not really a 'like' and a 'not like,'" she said. "It's an *analysis.* You're eating it and you're looking for the quality of the products. At this level, they have to be top quality. You're looking at 'Was every single element prepared exactly perfectly, technically correct?' And then you're looking at the creativity. Did it work? Did the balance of ingredients work? Was there good texture? Did everything come together? Did something overpower something else? Did something not work with something else? The pistachios—everything was perfect."

When her second appetizer arrived—the crab toast topped with toasted sesame seeds—she dipped the tines of her fork into a thick line of dark-green sauce that bisected the narrow rectangle of crab toast, and touched it to her tongue. Her eyes grew wide.

"This sauce is really good," she said. "It's so Jean-Georges. He does this French-and-Asian thing." She warned me that she would need a few seconds to figure out its precise ingredients. (She refused to divulge them, on the ground that Vongerichten would consider the recipe "a trade secret." I later learned from one of the waiters that the ingredients include



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powdered English mustard and soy sauce.) "It's so complex," she said. "It makes me smile."

Her Arctic char arrived, on a bed of watercress rémoulade, and accompanied by a julienne of apple. She took a bite. "It's perfectly cooked," she said, excitedly. "I mean, it's *textbook*."

For New York City's chefs—particularly those raised and trained in France—the arrival of the Michelin guide was both a blessing and a curse. Eric Ripert, the chef and co-owner of Le Bernardin, a three-star Michelin restaurant in midtown Manhattan, attended culinary school in France and trained in several three-star restaurants there. "Most of us very young cooks were aspiring to be one day a three-star chef," Ripert told me. "Very few of us were aspiring to have a bistro." But when Ripert joined Le Bernardin, in 1991, Michelin did not yet have an outpost in New York, and there were no plans to open one. "I remember sometimes chefs here, especially the French ones—and even some American ones—we were a bit frustrated that we will never be judged by Michelin," Ripert said. "But at the same time we were a little bit, like, more relaxed because obviously the Michelin puts pressure on chefs and restaurateurs to be excellent."

Le Bernardin was one of only four restaurants in New York (along with Jean Georges, Thomas Keller's Per Se, and the now defunct Alain Ducasse at the Essex House) that earned three stars in the début issue of the Michelin guide, and it has held on to its three stars ever since. Ripert estimates that revenues increased by eighteen per cent when the first guide came out, but the pressure to hold on to his stars has also escalated. "Today when I wake up and I go to work I don't think *guide*, I don't think *stars*," he insisted. "You can't. When I go to work, I think about my day and about what I have to achieve during my day as a chef." Still, Ripert admitted that, just before the publication of a new guide, he gets nervous. "It's not in my mind until a week before, and then every day I think about it," he said.

Like Ripert, Jean-Georges Vongerichten trained in three-star restaurants in France, and he was eager to know how its inspectors would rate him internationally, yet he also dreaded that knowledge. At a party thrown by Michelin at Rockefeller Center on the evening that this year's star rankings were announced, I spoke to Vongerichten, a dapper man with slicked-back dark hair and intense dark eyes. He was "happy and relieved," he said, to have retained his three-star ranking for Jean Georges, but he added, "Ah, but we lost a star, too—for my restaurant JoJo." He was referring to the moderately priced restaurant he runs out of a town house on East Sixty-fourth Street. In the previous four guides, JoJo had earned one star. Now it had none. Vongerichten was determined to get the rating back. "I will ask for the report on JoJo," Vongerichten told me. (Michelin will, on request, supply to chefs the inspectors' written report on their restaurant.) "I will study it. The good thing is, you have a year to make it better!"

Also at the party was the chef Daniel Boulud, a short, dark-haired man in a double-breasted suit, who bustled through the crowd, happily accepting congratulations from all who recognized him. That morning, Boulud had received a call from Naret informing him that, for the first time, his restaurant Daniel had been promoted from two stars to three. To many in the food-and-restaurant industry, it was overdue. Daniel consistently drew top rankings in the Zagat guide and for years had earned the *Times'* highest rank of four stars. During my lunch with Maxime, I had asked about Michelin's ranking of Daniel.

"We got beat up a lot the last five years for not giving him three," she said. "But it wasn't there."

"In terms of consistency?" I asked.

"Consistency—and accuracy," she said. "It's just technical. I mean, cooking is a science, and either it's right or it's wrong. And that's something that's very objective. Either a sauce is prepared accurately—or it's not. A fish is cooked accurately—or it's not. There's the talent, the creativity that has to be applied to get a three-star—he has to be a very talented chef—but there was just a lot of inconsistency." This year, she added, "it was so obvious. It was so solid." Michelin sent inspectors back to eat at Daniel eight times over the year, Naret told me. At the stars meeting, which he oversees, every inspector's report described the restaurant as faultless.

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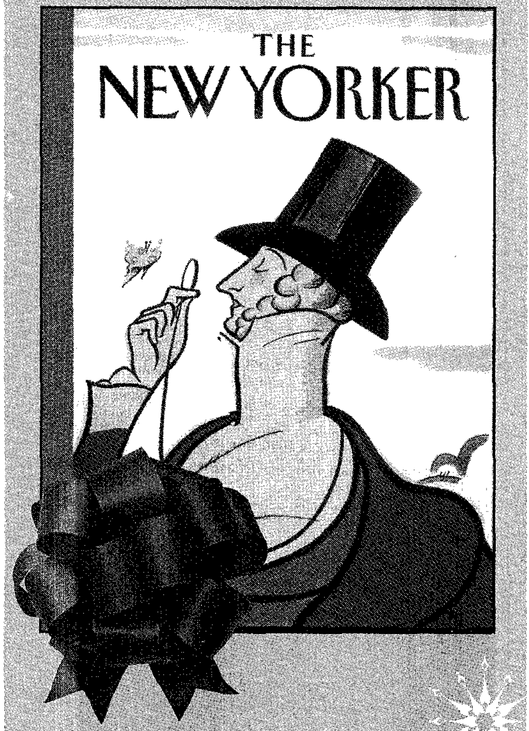

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I talked to Boulud a couple of days later. Like Ripert and Vongerichten, he trained in multiple three-star restaurants in France. He pronounced himself "proud and happy" to get his third star, but I sensed a less immediate embrace of the Michelin system. When I told him that Naret and the inspector had said that the restaurant, in previous years, lacked consistency and accuracy, he didn't exactly disagree. But he bridled a little, saying, "My restaurant is extremely chef-driven and extremely market-driven, and so the menu changes a lot—to the pleasure of my customers. Maybe the success I have today is because we keep giving pleasure in very simple ways or sometimes in a very spontaneous way and without thinking, Oh my God, am I perfectly consistent with that dish? I mean, Did I create the masterpiece where I don't need to change anything? I just need to program it now?"

Boulud's comments called to mind criticisms often levelled against Michelin: that its approach to restaurants and food is too wedded to an ideal of formal, technical accuracy that is not applicable to restaurants outside France. "When I lived abroad, in Rome, the Michelin guide was not, to be utterly candid, very helpful," Frank Bruni, the former *Times* restaurant reviewer, told me recently. "The kinds of restaurant in Italy that Michelin smiles on are restaurants that feel sort of fussily French." He added that the New York guide seemed to be trying to address this. "In New York—maybe because Michelin is trying to Americanize—you see the inspectors trying to move beyond that. Right from the get-go they gave a star to the Spotted Pig"—the chef April Bloomfield's upscale pub-food restaurant. "In years since, they've given stars to places like Dressler, in Brooklyn"—a restaurant that serves contemporary American food with a French twist. "So you can see them trying. . . . But I wonder if a certain sort of chromosomal stodginess can ever really be completely leached out of the Michelin guide and the system." He added, "The other thing that has always made me wonder about Michelin rankings is that they claim a lot of science to them, but is there a lot of soul to them? When Michelin describes its own system, I think, Where is the allowance for just a visceral, emotional response to a restaurant?" Bruni is also no fan of the *couverts* and other icons that Michelin uses: "Those crosses and spoons and all those symbols—it's like hieroglyphics, it's like cave etchings."

The waiter arrived with dessert. He placed a rectangular plate before Maxime. He pointed to one end, where a small piece of strawberry gâteau rested. "It begins on the right, with cumel-macerated strawberries, cream-cheese sponge cake, and pear-de-vanilla-center crème fraîche; to the left is strawberry sorbet swirled with lemongrass glacée and lavender crisp; and, lastly, a blueberry soda with fresh blueberries, which you can drink directly from the glass."

She thanked him, and the waiter moved off.

If she were on an inspection visit, she said, she would go home directly after finishing dessert and paying her bill, and begin filling out her report, which is made in the form of entries in a classification form supplied to all Michelin inspectors. She would list every ingredient in everything she ate, and the specifics of every preparation. She would rate these according to several criteria, including quality of the products, mastery in the cooking, technical accuracy, balance of flavors, and creativity of the chef. Then she would fill out the section that deals with setting, comfort, and service—and that determines the number of *couverts* the restaurant will earn. "I'll talk about the service, the crowd, the décor, the ambience, the wine list, the sake list—whatever is applicable," Maxime said. "The salt, the glasses, everything about the experience you had from the second you made the phone call to book the reservation, to when you walked in the door, when the hostess greeted you—or didn't greet you—to whatever little goodies you have at the end of the meal." For a restaurant like Jean Georges, filling out the reports would take two to three hours. A Chinese restaurant might take an hour.

It was three o'clock by the time we emerged onto the street in front of the restaurant. I couldn't recall ever feeling so full. I asked Maxime what she would do with the rest of her day. She said that she had to work that night, reviewing a restaurant in another borough.

Which one? I asked.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't tell you that." ♦

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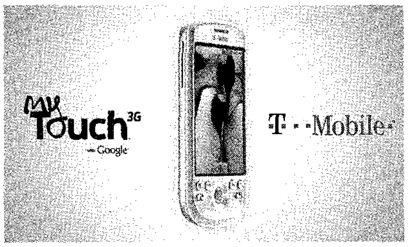

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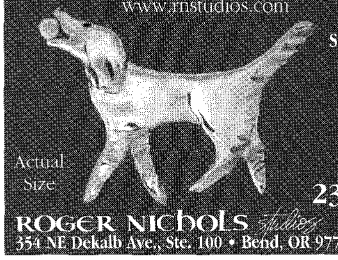

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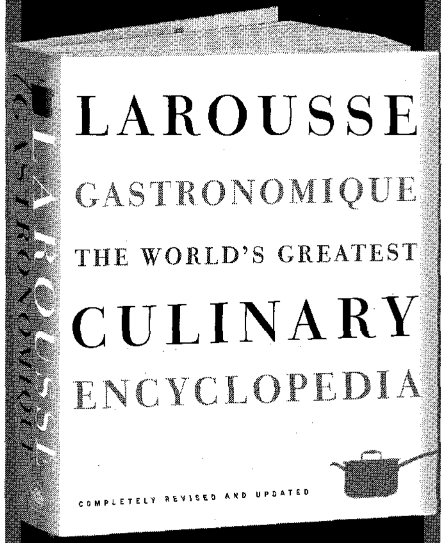

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DESSERTS DEPT.

SPIT CAKE

It's so much better than it sounds.

BY MIMI SHERATON

Hardly a lover of sweets, I do have intermittent longings for one cake that was both an object of research for a cookbook and a favorite indulgence until it disappeared from the New York scene, about twenty years ago. What haunts my memory is the *Baumkuchen*, a towering cake that is improbable both for the way in which it is produced and for the strong appeal of its simple, innocent flavor, redolent of butter, flour or cornstarch, eggs, sugar, and gently sweet hints of marzipan, rum, or vanilla. With a texture like that of firm but moist pound cake, this was one of the irresistible enticements of Yorkville, a food lover's paradise of wurst, delicatessens, candy and bread shops, *Bierstuben*, and restaurants in the colorful Germantown that thrived along and around East Eighty-sixth Street, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, until it began to fade in the nineteen-seventies.

I first sampled *Baumkuchen*, Germany's "king of cakes," some fifty years ago, at Café Geiger, one of Yorkville's most gemütlich bakery-cafés, or *Konditoreien*. One could shop at the front retail cases for treats to take home or to enjoy in the café, where the pastries were served by waitresses carrying doily-covered trays with silver pots of strong coffee and bowls heaped with *Schlag*. The setting, on wintry midmornings, was hermetically cozy, as stout local women wearing dark silk blouses, pearls, and deep, fur-felt hats chatted in German and restored themselves with the yeasty coffee cakes known as *Hefegebäck*, or the puffy, sugary jelly doughnuts that are *Berliner Pfannkuchen*, or, for me, *Baumkuchen*.

One look at that cake on Geiger's counter and I understood why Germans call it a tree cake. Narrow and hollow in the center, a finished *Baumkuchen* is usually between three and four feet in height, and the tapering sides are marked with smooth ringed ridges. The cake is iced with a thin sugar glaze or, less to my taste, heavy slatherings of chocolate. Not only does the form resemble a tree trunk; when sliced horizontally, the fine, curved shavings reveal rings of age, a magical result of the baking method. There are many ways to cut a *Baumkuchen* and many garnishes to enhance it, all of which are clearly illustrated in the "Neues Grosses Konditoreibuch," by Adolf Heckmann. First published in 1939, this is one of the bibles of German pastry chefs. It suggests elaborately decorated *Baumkuchen* for special occasions, and some sliced in small vertical bites and iced much like petits fours, or trunks filled with fruit cream, so that each cake ring, when sliced across, has a rich center.

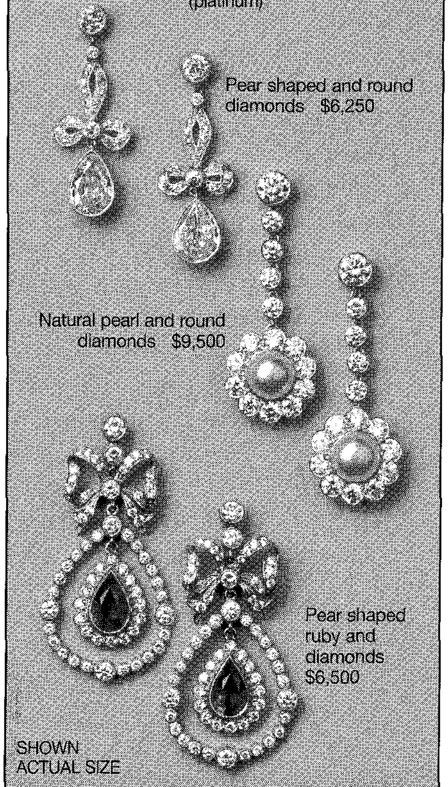
The exact origin of *Baumkuchen*, like that of so many other food specialties, seems murky. One theory is that it began as a Hungarian wedding cake. Another is that it was invented in the German town of Salzwedel, in the early nineteenth century, where it quickly became a favorite of the visiting Prussian king. Polish *sękacz*, Lithuanian *šakotis*, and Swedish *spettekaka* are other regional versions of what are classified as spit cakes, a term that might give pause in this era of blood-and-guts chefs. Fortunately, "spit" here refers to a horizontal rotisserie (now powered by electricity) that spins constantly above or in front of a wood or gas fire as the baker ladles over it anywhere from ten to thirty-six layers of sunny batter, which has the consistency of a foamy liquid custard.

But spit cakes were known long before the eighteen-hundreds and have been baked in southwest France, as *gâteaux à la broche*, for centuries. Françoise Fournier is among the few scattered artisans who continue to do so today. Now fifty-five, she helps her husband run their farm in the Aveyron village of Blayac, and uses their own eggs for the gâteaux, turning the spit by hand over a wood fire in the kitchen fireplace of the four-hundred-year-old stone house where she has lived since her marriage, thirty-six years ago. Upon learning that orders for her cakes are taken through a nearby distributor, BienManger.com, I tried to have one sent to New York. DHL refused to ship the cake because of strict U.S. Customs rules concerning food (never mind that DHL in Germany had sent me two *Baumkuchen* from Munich without incident). Realizing that Mme. Fournier was close to Roquefort, I enlisted Rob Kaufelt, a friend and neighbor who owns Murray's Cheese shop, in Greenwich Village, and gets shipments from that area. He offered to bring in a small *gâteau à la broche* as a sample, and voilà! Five days later, I was enjoying this slender cone of cake, with an artisanal toasty patina, a satisfyingly firm and chewy texture, and a woodsy, spare flavor that hinted of fresh butter not overpowered by sugar.

When sliced, the fine, curved shavings reveal rings of age, a magical result of the baking method. Photographs by Hans Gissinger.

England has been the home of spit cakes since the late Middle Ages. As described in "Food and Drink in Britain: From the Stone Age to the 19th Century," by C. Anne Wilson (1973), "Dried fruits and nuts were also enclosed in batter and fried in oil as 'rissoles of fruit'; or were threaded on to long separate threads, which were wound together around a spit and basted with batter as they roasted to make a 'trayne roste.' The 'trayne' was afterward cut into 'fair pieces of a span length' and eaten hot." The baking of *trayne roste* occasionally takes place just before Christmas, as part of Tudor-period cooking demonstrations held in the enormous kitchen of Henry VIII's Hampton Court, an event I have promised myself.

I researched the spit-baking method both at Café Geiger and, during a trip to Munich in 1964, at Konditorei Kreutzkamm, probably Germany's most famous producer of baked goods and a steady supplier since 1825, when the pastry baker, or *Konditor*, Heinrich Jeremias Kreutzkamm, opened his first shop in Dresden. I observed the process for the first time last summer in Chicago, having found nothing closer to New York. (Farther afield, there's the Cake Box, in Huntington Beach, California.) Because of its extant German and Eastern European communities, Chicago supports many ethnic food shops, including not only the pretty temptation that is the German-informed Lutz Café and Pastry Shop but also the Sweet World Pastry Shop, where *sękacz* is sold for ten dollars a pound and produced year-round by Adam Ryba, a mechanical engineer from Poland



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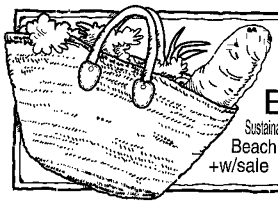

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who became a baker when he settled in Chicago.

Finally, the answer to a much asked question: How does the batter stay on?

In several ways. Gradually blushing red-faced as we sweltered in the Sweet World's tiny utility room, where Ryba clocks a three- to four-hour watch over his rotating *sękacz*, he demonstrated the most traditional method. First, he preheated a big, worn vertical gas-fired oven that looks like a Rube Goldberg improvisation of a sheet-metal barbecue grill. After wrapping a large metal cone in layers of parchment, he slid it over the spit's spindle, where it establishes the cake's tapering form. He then let the whole thing turn and heat for about fifteen minutes. "Cone must be hot, so first layer of batter sticks and also bakes the cake from the inside," he explained. The turning of the spit also kept the batter clinging as it wrapped around itself.

Donning a protective clear plastic face mask, somewhat like a welder's, as the heat built up, Ryba ladled the batter from a big pail. Every ladleful was poured into a trough under the spit so that it would become more liquid. As each layer toasted to a golden-brown glaze, the next was poured over, and so on until the desired width was achieved, thereby creating the defining brown rings one sees when the cake is sliced. With its rustic, nicely browned crust and the crunchy protruding brambles that developed as the drippings baked on, the cut *sękacz* revealed a buff-gold cake that had seductively dense sweet-smoky and slightly ripe overtones.

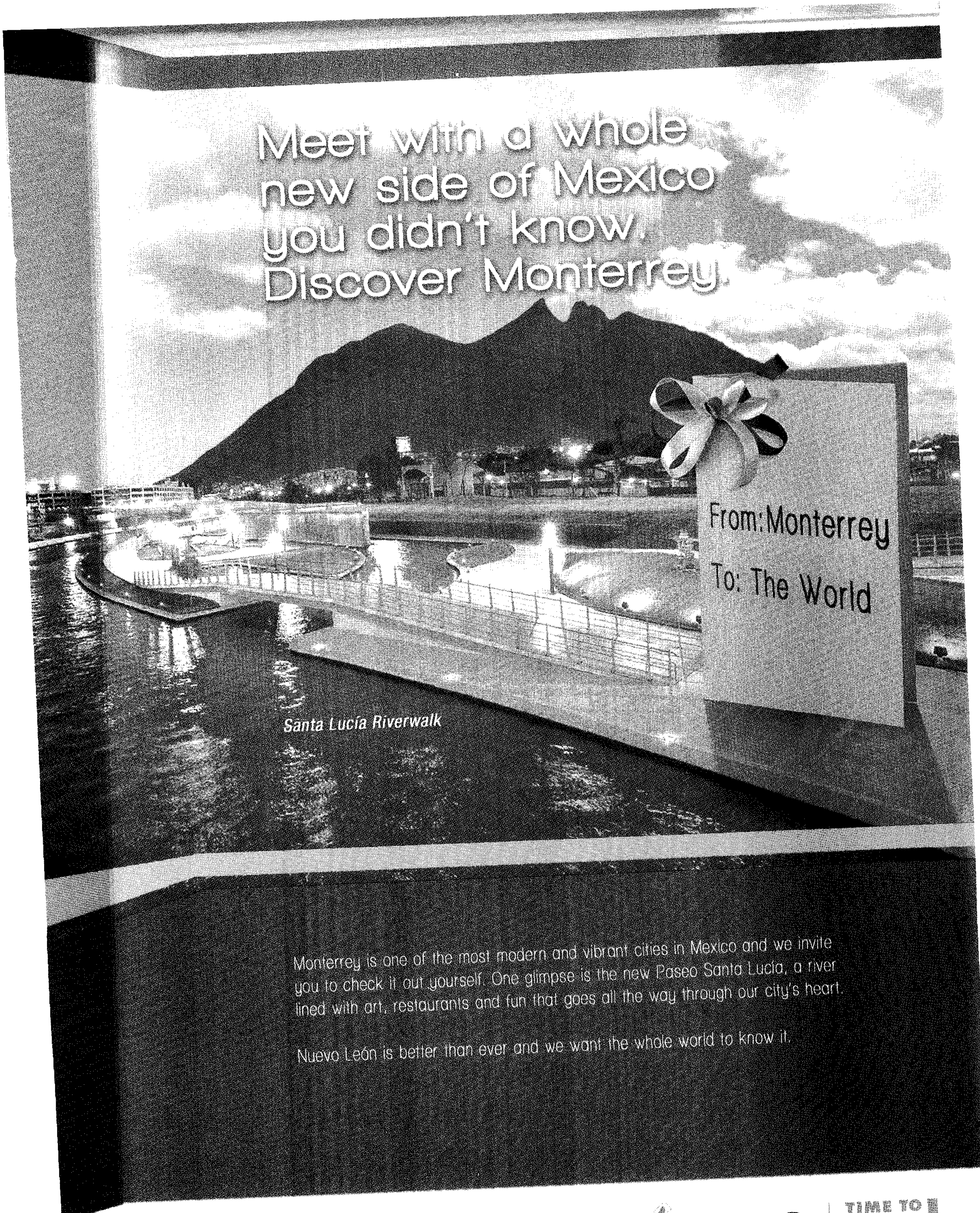
The most obvious difference between the German *Baumkuchen* and that of other countries is the finish. Eastern Europeans and Scandinavians like those toasted branchlike drippings to remain for crunchiness, so much so that the Swedish *spettekaka* resembles a tangle of yellow spun glass. The German cakes are usually smooth-sided, with ringed ridges, and at the sparkling Lutz pastry shop, with its small Mitteleuropa café, Jack Kozik, the twenty-nine-year-old baker, who, coincidentally, was born in Poland, demonstrated how that's accomplished, as he manned an impressively large *Baumkuchen* oven, which bore a stamp that read, "Rudolf Schlee. Berlin. 1945." (Considering the ruin that was Berlin in 1945, it's hard to imagine anyone manufacturing, of all things, a *Baumkuchen* oven.)

That oven was purchased by the café's founders, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Lutz, in 1948. Howard Gould, who bought the shop in 2003, with its co-owner, John Tzortzis, said, "We were really interested in the real estate, but they would sell only on condition that the pastry shop be continued, so we learned the business. Are we glad that we did!"

The Lutz *Baumkuchen* does not taper, because Kozik does not use a cone; before preheating the tubular spit, he wraps it in many layers of aluminum foil. Nor does he ladle the deliciously sweet batter on. Instead, he pours small quantities into the trough beneath the spit. Then he releases a lever that lowers the spit into the trough, where it revolves and picks up the batter before it is hoisted back up to cook. After about the eighth layer, Kozik holds a long wooden comb against the sides of the revolving cake to impress the ridges, a process that is repeated about six times until the ridges are firmly set. Then subsequent layers are baked on, and the drippings are smoothed off against a board as they turn. The process takes about two hours for a *Baumkuchen* that has twenty-four ridges, or is about forty-eight inches tall, with sixteen to eighteen layers of batter and weighing six pounds. The result was the closest to Kreutzkamm's that I have found, but with slightly less defined rings and a milder flavor devoid of marzipan.

Because such intensive labor leads to a pretty expensive piece of cake (about thirty dollars a pound), in this economy Lutz offers *Baumkuchen* only at Christmas or by special order.

If myriad cakes and pastries are becoming scarcer in the diet-conscious United States, so, apparently, are they in Germany, according to Elisabeth Kreutzkamm-Aumüller, who, in partnership with her mother, Friederike, is the fifth generation of her family to oversee the company. During a conversation at the recent Summer Fancy Food Show, at New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, where I happily nibbled on samples of the firm's Christmas stollen and *echte Baumkuchen*, Elisabeth reported, somewhat sadly, "Young people these days do not sit in



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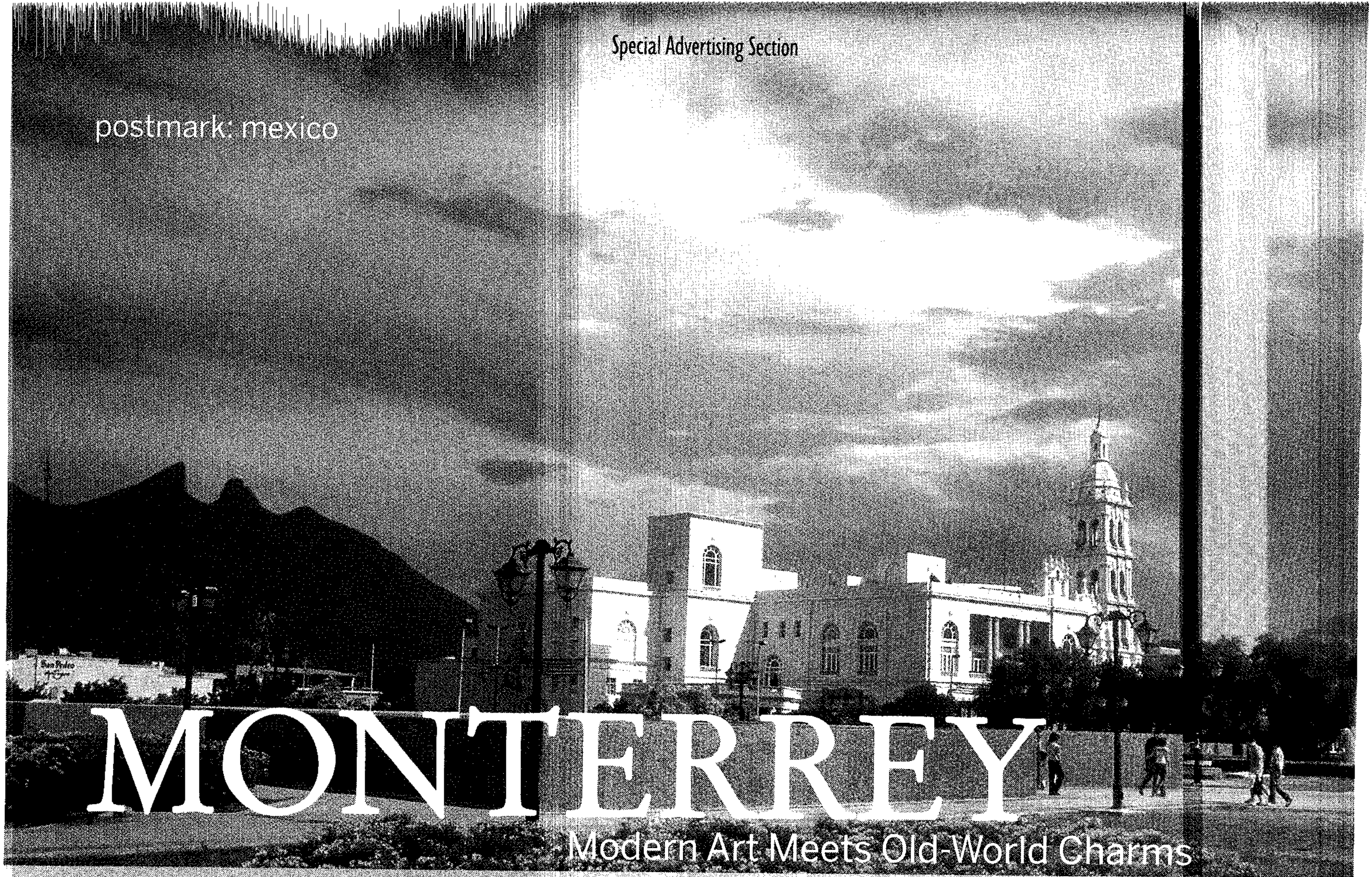


MONTERREY

Modern Art Meets Old-World Charms

MONTERREY, THE CAPITAL of the Mexican state of Nuevo León, mixes history with cosmopolitan flair. Offering a combination of progressive architecture and colonial buildings, it is best experienced by exploring the nearly hundred-acre **Macroplaza.** Filled with avant-garde monuments, Italianate fountains, lush gardens, and contemporary sculptures, the park includes works by international artists like Fernando Botero and Francisco Toledo.

Towering over the south end of the plaza is the daring **Faro del Comercio,** a modern lighthouse-like obelisk designed by Luis Barragán that beams a green laser light into the evening sky. Rufino Tamayo's landmark "Homage to the Sun" monument is located nearby. At the opposite end of the plaza—and the architectural spectrum—is the red-granite neoclassical **Palacio de Gobierno,** once the governor's palace and now a museum.

Alongside the plaza is the **Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey,** or MARCO, designed by the Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta and contains one of Latin America's most important art collections. The entrance is graced by a twenty-foot bronze sculpture of a dove by Juan Soriano.

The museum is adjacent to the imposing pink stone **Metropolitan Cathedral of Monterrey.** Construction began in the seventeenth century and it is an interesting blend of Baroque, neoclassical, and Art Deco styles. Also nearby, the **Museum of Mexican History** documents the country's history dating back to the pre-Hispanic era, and the **Metropolitan Museum of Monterrey** traces the city's five-hundred-year history. From Macroplaza, the **Santa Lucia Riverwalk** offers a pleasant mile-and-a-half stroll—or boat ride—along a canal leading to the **Parque Fundidora,** once the site of a steel foundry and now a sprawling public park with an art house theatre and a children's theme park, **Plaza Sésamo.**

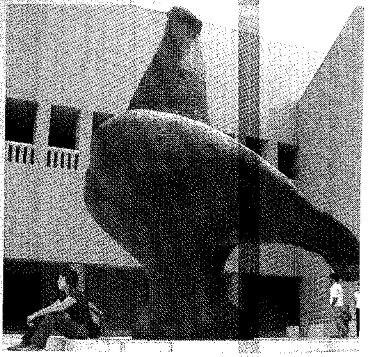
Monterrey's **Barrio Antiguo** historic district is home to art galleries, antique shops, bookshops, restaurants, bars, and cafés; its cobblestone streets come alive at night with the sounds of salsa, jazz, and reggae. Art dealers along renowned Mina Street exhibit their wares on Sunday afternoons; nearby, the **Café Paraíso** offers shoppers a place to break for a cappuccino.

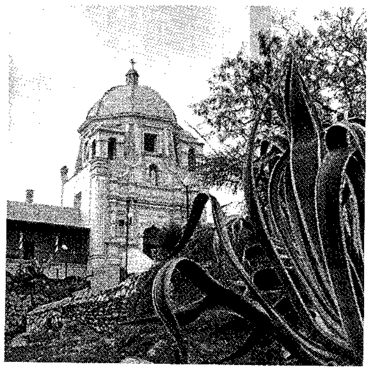
El Rey del Cabrito is where to go for Monterrey's specialty, *cabrito asado al pastor* (mesquite-grilled baby goat), while **Fonda San Francisco** is a bistro with chef Adrian Herrera at the helm; he's known for pre-Hispanic dishes like *molito de hongos* (chicken with mushroom mole sauce).

Monterrey is tucked in the foothills of several mountains, including the **Cerro del Obispado,** which has an observation deck with spectacular views. This compelling vista may be one of the best ways to appreciate the singular charms of Mexico's third-largest city, where history preserves the past and culture continues to thrive.

Plan your trip at www.monterrey.gob.mx or go to visitmexico.com.

As Mexico's most avant-garde city, Monterrey may also be its most versatile. It's a city brimming with options, where in one place visitors can enjoy a sophisticated urban scene, family entertainment, rich cultural heritage and customs, and easily accessible nature reserves to explore.





IMAGES, *FROM TOP:* MACROPLAZA PHOTO ©ARIEL DIACOVETZKY; MARCO'S SIGNATURE DOVE ©ROBERT VALENCIA; BARRIO ANTIGUO COURTESY OF MEXICO TOURISM; CERRO DEL OBISPADO ©FERMÍN TÉLLEZ

SAD VERSO OF THE SUNNY ______

Veldt? Sounds good to me.
Like melt. Back when you could eat Velveeta
and call it cheese. My grandfather's macaroni and cheese
featured a whole brick of Velveeta. I liked peeling away
its beautiful silver wrapper, *Velveeta Velveeta* all over in blue.

The expanses of time in which there was this grandfather
appeared endless when I was in them. Who
could see to the ends of the plains and so see her end
beyond them? Who could think to look? You
(like Ohio and its vowels) went on forever,
just ate your macaroni and cheese, relishing
the brown bubbles on top, then did the next thing,
were the next moment surrounded and held in it
by all the things you didn't know would end.
Nothing ceded. No portend.
Only geranium and melamine
and thank you,
everywhere preceded by some please.

—*Liz Waldner*

Konditoreien and order several pieces of cake, as we used to. They prefer to go to Starbucks for a quick cup of coffee and a biscuit. When the young women do come to Kreutzkamm, they ask, 'Should I have a salad or a piece of cake?' What a question! If nobody wants my beautiful cakes, who will learn to be a baker?"

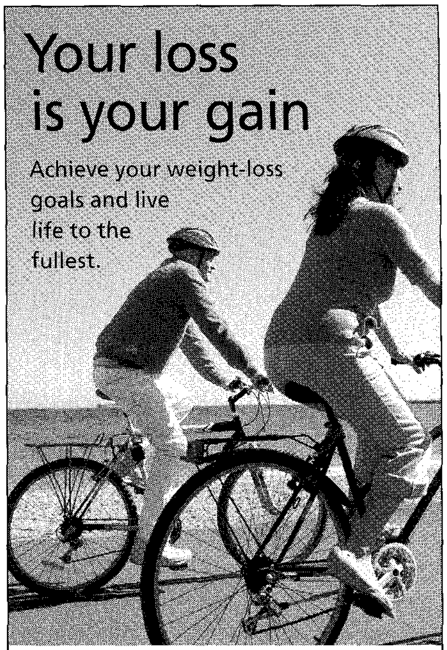
Fortunately, there are at least enough *Baumkuchen* lovers abroad to support Kreutzkamm's brisk export business, for which the *Baumkuchen* are iced with thick dark chocolate or sugar icing. "I prefer to export them that way because icing keeps the cake moist," Frank Reiser, the managing director, said. Boxed one- to two-pound cuts of *Baumkuchen* are sent to the U.S., although I have never come across one. More surprising, Japan happens to be a large market.

My first thought was that *Baumkuchen* is a modern fashion in Japan, little realizing that it has been a favorite there since 1919. That year, Karl Juchheim, a German baker working in China who had been taken prisoner by the Japanese, introduced the country to *Baumkuchen* and later opened a bakery in Kobe, which still flourishes. It has since been joined by other respected *Baumkuchen* bakeries throughout Japan.

While Kreutzkamm ships its *Baumkuchen* to Japan, Japanese bakers ship theirs to customers in the U.S. Trying a one-pound cut of *Baumkuchen* from the confectionary shop Minamoto Kitchoan, in Rockefeller Center, whose cake is produced in Okayama, I found it both gently sweeter and a bit fluffier than European specimens, with the rings uniformly spaced in neat, jewel-like precision.

Given the complexities of baking *Baumkuchen* in the traditional way, it was perhaps inevitable that a simpler, home-baked method, minus the spit, should have been tried, and especially by me, as I planned the recipes for my cookbook. To do this, I spooned very thin layers of batter into the bottom of a two-inch-deep square metal baking pan. As each layer was added, I slid the pan closely under a hot broiler in a scorching oven to bake from above and from below. Allowed to completely cool in the pan, the cake can supposedly be sliced downward, so that there are layers revealing the toasted surfaces but no rings.

Or would have been, had I not been hampered by blistered fingers, owing to snatching the hot baking pan from under the broiler flame, and if the upper layers, closest to the heat, had not charred black while the lower layers seemed to melt. Anyway, as far as I was concerned, no rings, no trunk, no *Baumkuchen*. It's either a tree or it isn't. ♦



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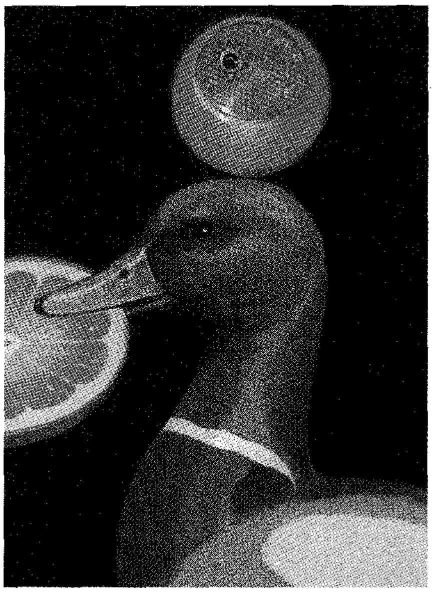
DUCK

When I was a kid growing up in London, going out to eat was a rare treat. Dressed in our best clothes, my family and I would visit a pub-restaurant with flock wallpaper, mock-Regency furniture, and a menu full of exotic-sounding international classics: moussaka, duck à l'orange, Black Forest gâteau.

Looking back, I can see that poor ingredients and poor execution meant that the meals were pretty awful. (It was, after all, the nineteen-seventies, a time when olive oil was available in Britain only at the chemist's—for putting in your ears rather than in a pan.) Instead of a rich meat tempered with fragrant bitter orange, my duck à l'orange was half a cheap roasted bird garnished with a chunk of raw fruit. The sauce, made from gravy granules and orange cordial, tasted of boiled sweets.

At the time, I was thrilled by the theatre of the dish—the duck borne to the table on a willow-pattern platter like a sacred idol—and I retained great affection for that childhood experience. Nostalgia has always played an important part in the tasting menu at the Fat Duck, my restaurant in Bray, Berkshire, because I am convinced that the foods we find most delicious are the ones that trigger memories and associations. Earlier this year, I began wondering if I could create a duck à l'orange that was faithful to the French original but also elicited the kind of excitement that I had experienced as a child.

For two months, working in the Fat Duck's lab, my development chefs and I prepared countless variations on a demi-glace until we had a rich, caramelized flavor from roasted duck bones, fruity and oaky elements from a Shiraz, and touches of spice from star anise, clove, allspice, and ginger. To concentrate these flavors even further, I put the mixture in a device known as the Rocket, which centrifuges liquid in a vacuum. This boils off the water at 40 degrees centigrade, leaving a thick syrup that retains all the fresh notes that are normally destroyed by heat. The sauce had an intense depth and a glossy sheen.



PIERRE MORNET

I'd never forgotten the boiled-sweet flavor of that childhood duck à l'orange, and it gave me an idea for the presentation of the dish. If I poured the demi-glace and some juiced and Rocket-concentrated orange into molds and set them with gelatin, I could make what looked like hard, shiny sweets or candies, especially if I wrapped them in the edible cellophane I had developed for a petit four. At the table, the waiter could light a flambé burner, pick a couple of sweets from a jar, drop them in a pan, add water, and heat, to produce, as if by magic, the sauce.

The candy theme also offered a playful way of serving the duck. A Terry's Chocolate Orange was an indulgence in seventies Britain: a ball of chocolate wrapped in foil that was designed to look like the skin of an orange. Why not transfer this visual conceit to duck à l'orange? I thought. Serve the diner what looks like an orange; when cut open, it would have duck meat inside.

I imagined this served warm, and began exploring ways of binding the meat into a ball with stuffing, as I would a boudin blanc, or by using transglutaminase, which sounds scarily scientific but is just an enzyme that acts as a culinary superglue, sticking proteins together. But the best method for creating the illusion of orange skin was to dip the ball of meat in a mixture of orange and gellan gum, a heat-resistant setting agent. I had used it with success in the past to coat salmon with licorice, but here it didn't feel right. The skin's flavor unbalanced the demi-glace, and the skin, once cut into, lay shapeless on the plate, like a discarded strip of peel.

I had always wanted to use gelatin as the setting agent, because its texture is superb, but had discounted it because heat melts it. Yet what if I served the "orange" cold, alongside slices of braised duck breast that would be topped with the sauce? The warm terrine I had envisaged gradually metamorphosed into a duck-liver parfait that I cooked in a bain-marie and then placed in the freezer in hemispherical molds. When they had frozen, I took two halves, put them together to make a ball, dipped them in gelatin, and let it set. To my delight, the gelatin skin that formed was dimpled with little pockmarks, just like a real orange.

The effect was so wonderfully unexpected that, as I stood in the lab, an unstoppable grin spread across my face. I knew that I'd come up with a dish that worked because I felt the same way I had as a kid, when that platter of duck was placed on the table in front of me. ♦

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LETTER FROM CHINA

REDS

The creation of a wine-loving class.

BY EVAN OSNOS

Donald St. Pierre, Sr., founded A.S.C. Fine Wines in Beijing in 1996, in partnership with his son, Donald St. Pierre, Jr., whom everyone calls Don, Jr. The St. Pierres were not winemakers or sommeliers. The elder St. Pierre, who had spent his early years in the automobile business, in Detroit and Beijing and elsewhere, was more of a "hot-dog-and-bourbon type," as a former colleague put it. But they knew sales. In 1989, four years after St. Pierre arrived in the country, Jim Mann, a former Beijing bureau chief for the Los Angeles *Times*, pronounced him "probably the single best-known businessman working in China." Over the years, the St. Pierres had sold, or considered selling, baby products, gas masks, photocopiers, golf gloves, scrap metal, lingerie, sugar, pistachios, and Chinese and Russian ammunition.

When the St. Pierres began importing wine, after buying a Hong Kong shelf company called Asia Solutions Corporation, they also created a product of their own. The family was Canadian by birth, but St. Pierre figured, "God damn, let's use our French name." Château St. Pierre was California bulk red wine, bottled at a factory in Beijing. It bore a label with the stencilled image of a château, which the importers had copied from a coffee-table book. No bottle cost more than forty-five yuan—less than six dollars at the time.

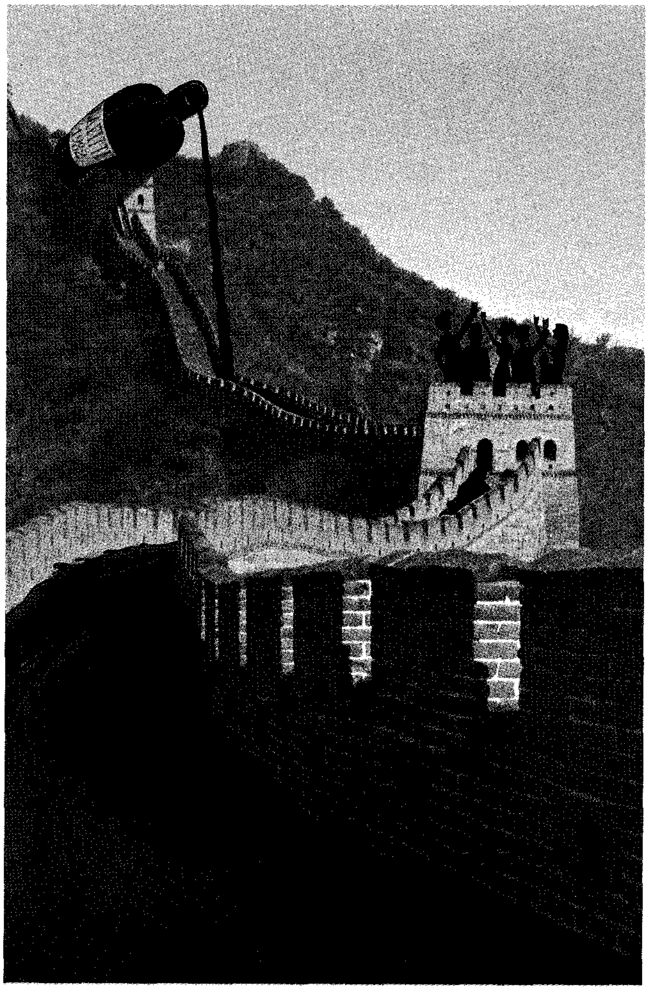
Much of what St. Pierre knew about the wine business had been learned from drinking. He was a dedicated student in that respect, but shortly after putting his life savings into the wine business he found that he was nearly broke. "This great idea that we had wasn't looking too great," Don, Jr., said. The Chinese people were scarcely interested in wine.

At one point, St. Pierre ordered a bottle at a restaurant in Beijing and watched a huddle of wait staff struggle to open it with a church key. (The St. Pierres responded by giving away corkscrews.) Two years later, when the St. Pierres flew to Bordeaux for Vinexpo, the wine world's largest trade fair, nobody paid much attention to them.

Parts of China sprawl across the forty-fifth parallel, the fertile latitude that crosses Bordeaux, and the country has produced small quantities of grape wine since the Han dynasty, but wine was never popular. Many Chinese called it "red liquor," if only to distinguish it from "white liquor," or *baijiu*, the ferocious grain alcohol that was far more prevalent. For decades, enormous state-run industrial wineries had blended grapes with chemicals and coloring, and the resulting plonk turned off the few Chinese drinkers who dared to try it.

But, as China opened up, the prospects for wine improved. Agricultural authorities were trying to wean the country from *baijiu*, so that the grain could be used for food instead of alcohol; in 1996, the State Council banned the consumption of *baijiu* at ministry banquets. China was also preparing to enter the World Trade Organization, which would require reductions on import duties and therefore lower the price of wine from abroad.

Chinese drinkers had a long tradition of diluting wine with soft drinks. (A popular saying held: "Red wine and Sprite—the more you drink, the sweeter you'll be.") But that practice was regarded as uncouth among younger drinkers, and some in the foreign-wine world began to wonder if China's growing middle class might turn to wine for an air of sophistication, much the way that Americans had picked up wine in the sixties, when advertising and jet travel made it an object of aspirational spending.



The Chinese vogue for Lafite is driving up global prices.

ZOHAR LAZAR; PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN WOODWORTH/GETTY

In late 1998, St. Pierre came up with an idea: a cardboard gift set for Chinese New Year containing two bottles of wine and a pair of ladies' underwear visible through a cellophane window. His Chinese staff told him that China wasn't ready for that, and suggested a Western necktie instead. Ties were growing in popularity, and St. Pierre negotiated a deal with a factory to produce them for sixty cents each. He put together two hundred wine-and-tie gift boxes and sent them to PriceSmart, a big-box discounter in Beijing and Shanghai. "The first day they put them out—bang! Shit, they're all gone," he recalled. "How about that?"

Before the season was over, A.S.C. had sold two hun-

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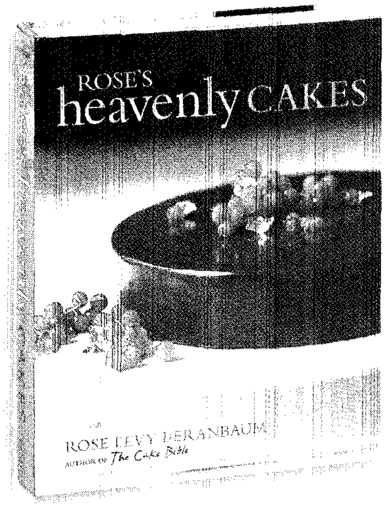
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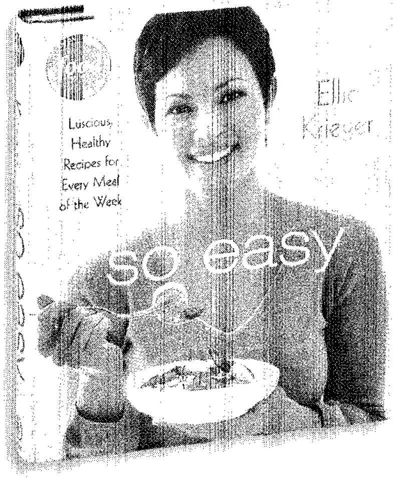
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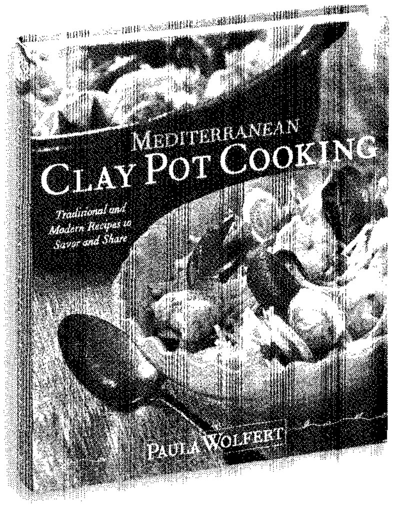
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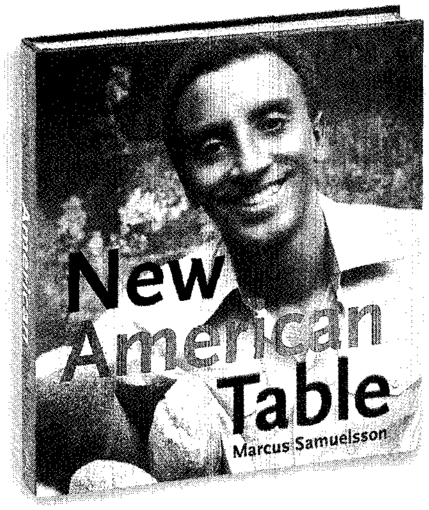
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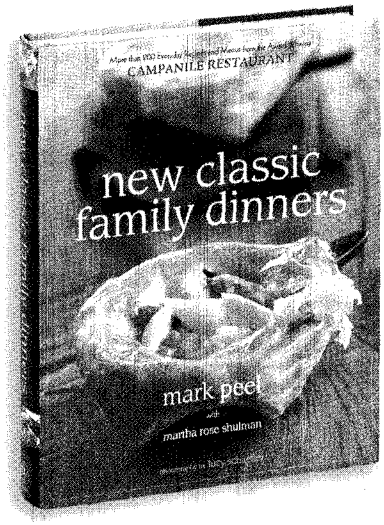
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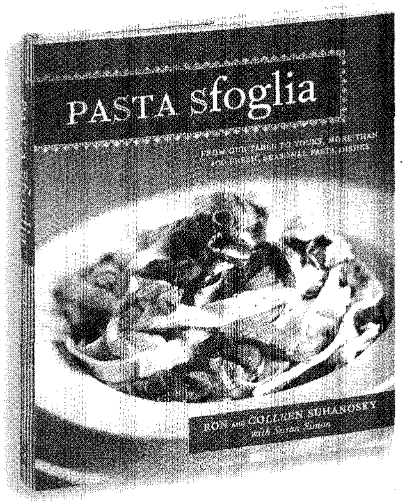
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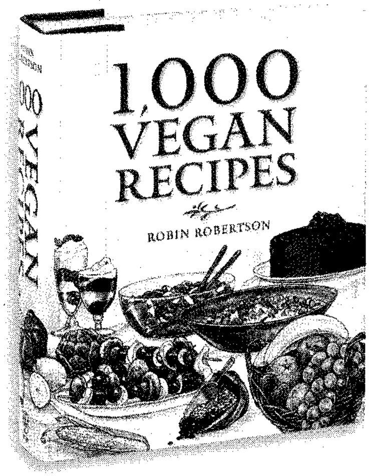
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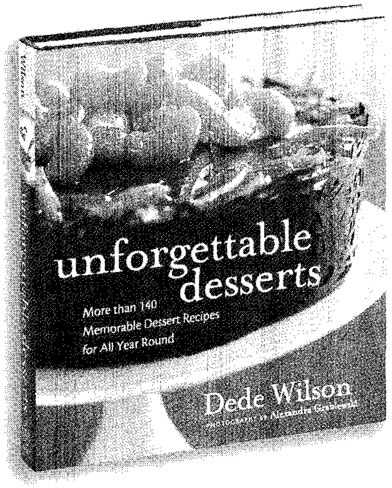
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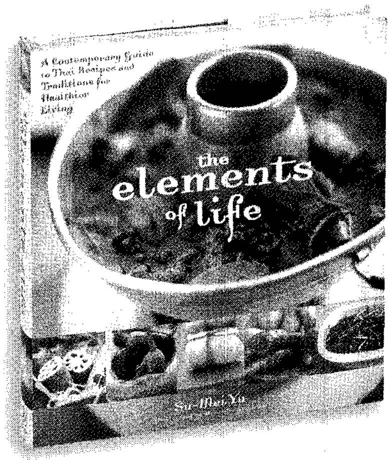
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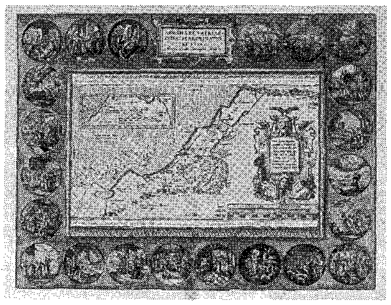
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dred thousand gift boxes. The following year, the promotion was repeated, and the year after that. "It saved the goddam business," St. Pierre says.

At sixty-eight, St. Pierre has blond-gray hair and a beard, and a gravelly voice rasped by smoking. He is fond of expensive suits and wide neckties, a chesty style that evokes the heyday of Lee Iacocca, who was once his boss. St. Pierre belongs to a generation and class in which a man would rather not light his own cigarette if a waitress will do it in return for a wink. "He and my mother never saved a penny," Don, Jr., told me. "I can't imagine how many times they were close to not being able to have enough money to pay for my school. It wasn't like he was out gambling. He was spending money on us. He was enjoying life. He's one of those guys that, if he's got a thousand dollars in his pocket, he feels like a prince, and he'll go out and spend it on a good dinner."

On many nights, St. Pierre can be found on the second stool from the left at the bar of the Capital Club, a members-only establishment that caters to both the Chinese and foreigners, on the fiftieth floor of a skyscraper with broad, unimpeded views of Beijing. A few years ago, when he discovered a woman named Zhu Wen sitting in his customary spot, his first words to her were "I'm Don St. Pierre. Ask anybody. That's my seat." She told him to get lost. Two years later, he married her. (A previous marriage, of thirty-nine years, had ended in 2004.)

When I joined St. Pierre at the club recently, nearly everyone who passed by stopped to greet him. "Look at that asshole!" he replied with a smile, his version of high praise. St. Pierre's comfort with confrontation extends to his only hobby: golf. At a charity golf tournament in 1997, St. Pierre accused a rival foursome of cheating. The team was composed of senior Communist Party officials, including a high-ranking military general and the chairman of a large arms manufacturer. St. Pierre's friends urged him to back off, but not before St. Pierre had waved his finger and said, "*You* fuck off. You're a cheater!" (His protests persuaded tournament officials to give his team a share of the winnings.) I asked St. Pierre if he thought that he had ever been too aggressive. He frowned. "What does that mean? 'Too aggressive.' Do you like to kill your competitors or don't you?"

His tactics have made A.S.C. China's largest wine importer, with annual revenues of more than seventy million dollars. Jancis Robinson, a prominent wine critic in London, wrote that the St. Pierres have attained "a position in the Chinese wine scene similar to that of the Gallos in the U.S."

"A.S.C. has really introduced wine into China," Patricio de la Fuente Saez, a rival importer, told me. "I think they're definitely the pioneers. They've done an amazing job. Without A.S.C., probably half the people here wouldn't be drinking wine."

In 1998, Gernot Langes-Swarovski, the scion of the Austrian crystal empire, bought a forty-nine-per-cent stake in the company, and A.S.C. used the investment to expand. By 2001, it had turned its first profit. (Langes-Swarovski later increased his share to sixty-three per cent.)

The St. Pierres leveraged their size and reach to lure wine labels away from their rivals. Wine importers proliferated—there are now more than a thousand—and before long A.S.C. had signed deals with more than a hundred suppliers. The competition became so intense that, at times, it took on almost military tones: whenever possible, A.S.C. staffers gathered intelligence on suspicious ships crossing the Pacific, in order to detect cases of "paralleling," in which a vender would buy a load of wine abroad and send it into China to undercut the local importer.

From 2004 to 2008, A.S.C.'s revenue increased an average of forty-six per cent each year. The business was growing so fast that Campbell Thompson, a marketing director at the time, said, "A big part of the job was making sure the wheels didn't fall off." In 2007, the St. Pierres bought more bottles of Château Latour, one of the most sought-after Bordeaux wines, than anyone else in the world.

Then, on March 6, 2008, the Smuggling Prevention Department of the Chinese Customs Service launched an investigation of wine importers on suspicion of "falsifying prices." Agents began visiting wine companies to sift through years' worth of paperwork for evidence that importers were under-declaring the value of wines to escape customs duties.

A.S.C. Fine Wines, which had moved its headquarters to Shanghai, was one of the targets. In recent years, Don, Jr., a forty-two-year-old father of two, had taken over the company's daily operations as the chief executive. He was partial to tailored suits, horn-rimmed glasses, and, occasionally, bright-red pants. He had met his wife, Monica Xu, a Shanghai native, at a wine event, and their children were growing up in a bilingual home. Compared with his father, he was understated, but that only masked his intensity. "I've never met anybody who's so driven," Joel Thevoz, a friend from their student days at George Washington University, told me. Don, Jr., kept an office that was fastidiously neat and festive, arrayed with stemware and expensive bottles of wine. He was usually there by eight, but he happened to be away the day the customs authorities arrived. Shortly after their visit, they called him to ask that he come in for questioning. When he returned to Shanghai, two days later, he asked his driver to deliver him to the customs office. From there, he was taken to the Shanghai Detention Center and placed in a cell with five other detainees: three from China, one from Hong Kong, one from Nigeria. Two were awaiting trial for violent crimes. The detainees slept on mattresses on the floor. Except for occasional laps in an exercise pen, they remained in the cell around the clock. Don, Jr., was desperate to see a lawyer, but, when the time came, the visit was dispiriting. "He's telling me the law, and I'm thinking to myself, Well, first, I don't think I really understand it, and, second, what I understand doesn't sound very good," he recalled. "I left that meeting feeling much, much worse."

St. Pierre quickly began contacting influential friends to help resolve the case. He wrote a public letter to Jancis Robinson, saying, of his son, "I have believable assurances he will be back in his office in a few days and this saga will go the way of many other China sagas I have endured in my 22 years here. FORGOTTEN."

Donald St. Pierre was born on an island in the Ottawa River, on a farm that had no electricity, heat, or running water. In winter, the family slept in the kitchen to be near the stove. When Don was nine, his father, a pipe fitter, found work in Windsor, Ontario, across the river from Detroit. Don's first job was in the mailroom at Ford. At night, he took political-science and economics classes at the University of Windsor, Henry Ford Community College, and elsewhere, but he never obtained a degree. When he was nineteen, he met Patricia Collison, an aspiring flight attendant from Windsor, who had snuck out of a Y.W.C.A. dance and encountered St. Pierre at a party. "He talked about the future more than any of our friends did," she said. "I had complete faith in him. He just had this self-assurance that if you follow me,

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and trust me, I'll take you to places we'll enjoy." They married four years later. She worked at Pan Am's Clipper Club lounge, while he was working his way up at Ford. They had one child, Don, Jr., and in 1976 they moved to Detroit.

By 1982, St. Pierre was a director of supply for international Jeep operations at American Motors, and the company assigned him to Indonesia. "To discover that we were going to be on one of seventeen thousand islands was kind of staggering," Patricia said. In Jakarta, Don, Jr., who was in high school, fell in love with the mythology of adventure in Asia; he adored "Tai-Pan," the novel by James Clavell, about the nineteenth-century exploits of a Hong Kong trader who was never armed with less than a "knife in the crease of his back and another in his right boot." In college, Don, Jr., studied Mandarin and talked so much about Clavell's book that a friend nicknamed him Little Tai-Pan.

Within a few years, St. Pierre was promoted to president of a pioneering joint venture known as Beijing Jeep, which was intended to assemble Jeep Cherokees in China and lead the way to greater trade between China and the United States. But he encountered crippling bureaucratic problems inside Beijing Jeep—mainly, the Chinese government didn't want to use valuable U.S. dollars to import parts. As Jim Mann later wrote in the book "Beijing Jeep," St. Pierre became known for airing these problems to the press. When he wrote a letter to Zhao Ziyang, the Chinese Premier, warning that the venture was failing, the cadre of the Communist Party that was assigned to Beijing Jeep scolded him. St. Pierre lost his temper. "I'm going to continue to do just what I'm doing!" he yelled, according to Mann's account. The cadre responded, "You're lucky you're not a Chinese, because you'd be in big trouble."

St. Pierre urged his bosses to play hard, saying, "They can't afford to let us walk out of here." He was right; the Chinese negotiators relented. On Chinese television, St. Pierre was shown shaking hands with Zhao, and acquired valuable friendships; Zhu Rongji, an economic official who oversaw Beijing Jeep, was later promoted to Prime Minister.

Some of St. Pierre's ventures did not end as well. After Beijing Jeep, he spent two years as the president of China Automotive Components Corporation, which had a parent company so dysfunctional that once, during a drunken business trip to Outer Mongolia, a translator cut off a factory manager's ear. The venture initially lost tens of millions of dollars, as chronicled in "Mr. China," a memoir by Tim Clissold, another executive. ("One thing was for sure," Clissold concluded of doing business in China. "If you played by the rules, you were finished.") St. Pierre's boss at the time, Jack Perkowski, also wrote a book, in which he declared, "To say that Don was bested in the negotiations by the Chinese is a severe understatement." (St. Pierre says Perkowski is "full of shit.") St. Pierre has appeared in at least five books on the history of economic engagement with China.

In the early nineties, with the help of Chinese industrial connections, St. Pierre and his son embarked on a new business: importing Chinese gun parts into the United States, mostly SKS rifle stocks and Makarov pistol accessories. Neither of them had ever shot more than a BB gun, St. Pierre told me, and some of their new associates were "greasier than grease." "It was a business," he said. But they soon realized that greater profits lay in ammunition, and they began importing Chinese-made 7.62-mm. rounds for semiautomatic weapons, along with shotgun shells and .22-calibre bullets.

In May, 1995, agents from the F.B.I., the A.T.F., the Customs Service, and other agencies raided the St. Pierres' warehouse in Santa Clara, California, and seized their entire inventory, accusing them of illegally importing ammunition that had been banned a year earlier—seventy-four million rounds, which a federal agent called "the largest seizure of ammunition ever in the U.S." Indictments, including, potentially, conspiracy, smuggling, and false entry of merchandise, were expected within days. It was national news—the Oklahoma City bombing had occurred only weeks earlier—and an A.T.F. agent was quoted comparing the St. Pierres' stockpile to the arsenal of a small country.

The St. Pierres responded to the charges with indignation; the case was "absolutely ridiculous," Don, Jr., told a reporter from the San Francisco *Chronicle* at the time. The government had accused them of importing banned Chinese munitions, but the St. Pierres insisted that their goods were Russian, not Chinese. Five weeks later, the authorities dropped the case—"a history-making fiasco," the San Jose *Mercury News* called it. The St. Pierres, it turned out, had anticipated the ban on Chinese munitions and switched to Russian sources more than a year before the raid. Even though they were cleared, the shutdown cost them so much business that they decided to try something else. They still had a million and a half dollars to invest, and were eager to import something into China. They considered trading nuts (too crowded); sugar (too crooked); golf clubs (too small). They were poking around the scrap-metal trade when someone mentioned that the wooden posts that hold up grape vines might be manufactured cheaply in China. If we're going to look at the wine posts, St. Pierre thought, why not look at wine itself? Friends from the automobile industry had connections to wineries in California, Italy, and Australia, and the St. Pierres put together a small catalogue of wines to sell.

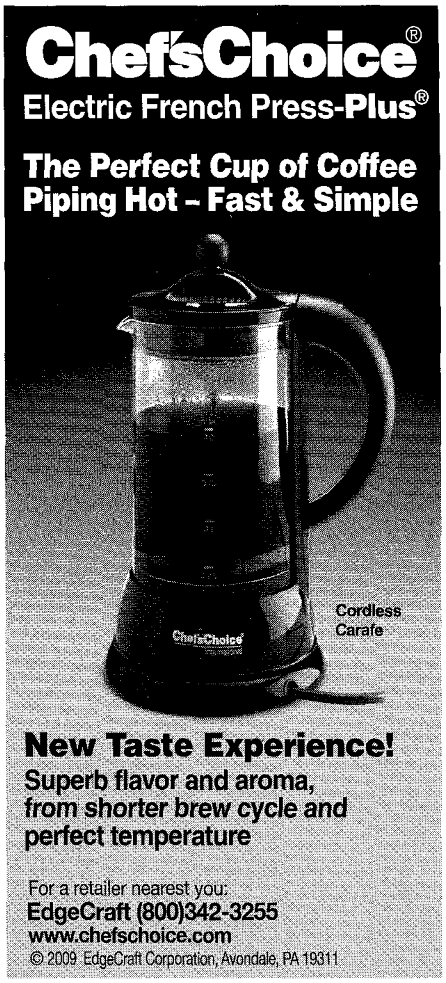
In the past few years, whenever the St. Pierres returned to Vinexpo they found themselves in high demand among European winemakers. Wine consumption in Europe had been falling for four decades, as younger generations continued to consume less wine than their parents had. The average French adult drinks forty-three litres of wine each year—roughly a glass a day—down from three glasses per day during the sixties. (Half of all French young people report drinking no wine at all, preferring beer and liquor, or bottled water, soda, and juice.) Similar declines in Italy, Spain, and other countries have left Europe with a vast surplus, known in the trade as "the wine lake" and estimated, in 2006, at a billion and a half litres—the equivalent of four bottles of undrunk wine for every European citizen. As a remedy, the European Union has sponsored a "crisis distillation" program, which processes excess wine into bioethanol and cleaning products, and encourages some farmers to uproot their vines and get out of the business "with dignity," as the European agriculture commissioner put it.

Selling to China is a more attractive solution. Today, China is the world's fifth-largest wine consumer, and is gaining on Germany, according to the Wine Institute, in San Francisco. The Chinese still drink mostly Chinese wine, which has improved, in part because in 2003 the government banned thickeners, saccharin, cyclamate, artificial colors, and other additives. Foreign imports make up less than fifteen per cent, but to French winemakers it is "more than an El Dorado," Frédéric Engerer, the president of Château Latour, told me. The Bordelais have never quite acclimated to the embrace of distant customers. "In the very beginning of the eighties, there was a huge demand from Texas, and in France we were saying, 'These Texan people—they don't know how to drink our wines. They are like barbarians,' " Engerer told me. "Then there were the Japanese at the end of the eighties, beginning of the nineties, and they were not even drinking it; they were giving it as gifts. That made us laugh also. Now there are the Chinese." But today, Engerer said, France cannot afford to be arrogant. "We should be a little more calm about this and say, 'Thank you for buying something that might not be in your culture,' " he said.

While many Americans and Europeans gravitate toward "extreme value" wines that sell for a few dollars a bottle, China is in the thrall of conspicuous consumption. ("In our shops, if we have slow-moving items we raise the price," one wine importer told me.) Robert Parker—Pa Ke, to his Chinese fans—made his inaugural visit last year, a trip that included a twenty-three-hundred-dollar-a-head dinner atop the Great Wall. The seven-course meal was a black-tie affair; tables were laid out between two ancient stone-and-brick guard towers on the Badaling section of the Wall, a former military outpost that has been refurbished and fitted with a cable car.

One evening not long ago, I joined a dinner event organized for A.S.C. customers in Shanghai, at a restaurant called Exquisite Bocuse, which was decorated with dark-wood furniture, Art Deco stained glass, and Grecian vases. I took a seat at one of several large round tables, across from Bob Miao, a thirty-five-year-old manager in an auto-parts company, who wore glasses and a crewcut. He had stumbled upon wine a decade earlier, he said, when he worked for a French company. Recently, he had become confident in his new hobby, and last spring he put seventy thousand dollars of his savings into wine futures. He hopes that some of it will prove to be a wise investment. "I will drink the rest," he said, half joking.

The evening was organized as a som-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melier competition, intended to celebrate the pairing of Australian wine with Chinese cuisine. Three sommeliers from local restaurants and hotels were being tested on how well they matched Shiraz, Chardonnay, and other wines with dishes like Heavy Rum Soup with Shark Bones and Yang Zhou Boiled Dried Bean Curd with Special Soup. The room grew bustling and jolly, as people egged on the competitors, snapped pictures, and toasted one another with expensive glasses of wine. (Chinese wine drinkers sometimes toast with full glasses downed in a single gulp, a tradition known as *ganbei*, or "clean cup.") "In China, people like company," Miao told me. "Most restaurants are boisterous—people talk loud, laugh loud, and it's noisy. Westerners who come to China for the first time might feel uneasy. But that might be the same thing for a foreigner who goes to France for the first time and goes to a Michelin two-star restaurant. It's so quiet!"

Chinese drinkers are especially fond of Château Lafite Rothschild, one of the most expensive Bordeaux estates. (A bottle of 1982 Lafite sells for more than three thousand dollars.) Chinese consumers buy so many bottles of Lafite each year—the estate told me that the exact figure is confidential—that they drive up global prices, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the Lafite effect. Château Lafite Rothschild recently announced that it is developing a winery in Shandong Province to produce the first "Chinese Grand Cru." It is in the port city of Penglai, which has adopted the nickname Nava Valley to attract tourists. Lafite is creeping into Chinese pop culture the way that Cristal became the champagne of American hip-hop. On the edge of Beijing, a real-estate developer has constructed a life-size replica of the Lafite château that is available for weddings and other events. In the Hong Kong action movie "Young and Dangerous—Part V," a character tells a Mob boss, "Bring several bottles of '82 Lafite and call in your prettiest girls!"

Inside the Shanghai Detention Center, the lights stayed on around the clock. In addition to Don, Jr., the authorities had detained Carrie Xuan, an A.S.C. vice-president, in a separate jail.

St. Pierre, meanwhile, hired lawyers and prepared for a vigorous defense. He gathered pictures of himself with Zhu Rongji, the former Prime Minister, and showed them to investigators to emphasize how long he had been doing business in China. He enlisted the help of an old friend, Clark T. Randt, the U.S. Ambassador to China at the time, and the consulate in Shanghai made formal inquiries into Don, Jr.,'s case. But the strategy bordered on counterproductive, St. Pierre told me later: "The customs people told me that if you keep the U.S. government involved you may never see your son again." (The Shanghai customs office declined to comment on the case.)

The detentions had prompted unflattering commentary about China's wine trade. Simon Tam, a Hong Kong-based wine consultant, wrote a pair of articles on Jancis Robinson's Web site describing what he called "common practice by a number of wine importers to systematically undervalue the declared value of wine" by more than fifty per cent. He cited customs records in France which showed that, in 2007, far more wine was exported to China than appeared on Chinese customs records. (St. Pierre wrote a letter to the Web site in which he called the piece a "hit job.") Like other aspects of China's emergent economy, the wine trade appeared to have grown too fast for regulators to keep pace. The wine importer estimated that seventy per cent of fine wine in China is smuggled, including what is underdeclared at the border. With so much competition and smuggling driving down prices, he said, "That's the cheeky thing in the wine business here—if you do everything in the legal way, you can't be price-competitive."

On April 8, 2008, twenty-eight days after Don, Jr., was detained, he was released. A.S.C. acknowledged a limited number of undervaluations, he says, and it agreed to pay back-duties and fees totalling 1.8 million yuan—about two hundred and sixty-four thousand dollars, a relatively small sum, given the company's volume of imports. Don, Jr., was never charged with a crime. He says that A.S.C. made technical mistakes that grew out of the fluctuating values of fine wine and foreign currencies. "We were hedging euros against dollars, and sometimes we did it right and sometimes we did it wrong," he told me. Carrie Xuan had been released three days earlier. More than a year later, when I asked her about her detention, she wept. She still works at A.S.C., though her sister has begged her to leave the company. She has never told her parents that she was jailed. "They are too old to suffer this," she said.

The wine investigation widened, and by the end of 2008 it had led to punishment in twenty-nine cases, on wine valued at twenty-five million dollars, according to a report in *Legal Daily*, a state-run paper. Companies were accused of doctoring invoices and "laundering documents" through Hong Kong, where there are no tariffs on wine imports. The St. Pierres did none of that, Don, Jr., says. But the case was "a wake-up call," he told me one afternoon at his apartment in Shanghai. "No one sits you down and says, 'You've arrived in China. These are the laws.' Because people just don't think they apply to them! And they do now."

In the months since his release from detention, Don, Jr., has made A.S.C. more of a conventional Chinese company: he hired a chief operating officer who was a former government official with deep contacts and knowledge of the law. For years, foreigners bemoaned the absence of the rule of law while exploiting it. Today, Don, Jr., says, "I think what we went through clearly shows that if you are engaged in business you are subject to the same rules as everybody else."

Down the block from A.S.C.'s headquarters, the company operates the Wine Residence, a serene, refurbished mansion "for discerning wine lovers." Members can stow bottles in dark-wood lockers with brass nameplates, in a temperature-controlled cellar. It is open to the public for meals and events that A.S.C. bills as "wine education." One morning, I enrolled in an intermediate class, and took my seat at a long table set with empty glasses.

The table was surrounded by ten Chinese students, men and women ranging from their twenties through their forties. Some of them had signed up; others worked at expensive restaurants and had been sent by their bosses. Each of us received a stack of books in English and Chinese, and I flipped ahead to a sample test question:

> The word "Beerenauslese" on a bottle of German Riesling indicates that the wine is (a) blended from several vineyard sites, (b) sparkling, (c) aged in bottle for a long period before release, (d) made from very ripe grapes.

Translating the full Western culture of wine into Chinese had produced erratic results. Some grapes and regions had been rendered phonetically (Château Margaux had been translated, with utilitarian efficiency, as "Ma ge"); others were described idiomatically ("Jiaohuang xin bao"—or "the pontiff's new fortress"—turned out to be Châteauneuf du Pape).

The classroom carried an air of apprehension. The teacher—a tall man in a short-sleeved white button-down shirt whom we called Teacher Hao—tried to simplify things. "How do you remember Italian names?" he said in Chinese. No one responded. "If it ends in 'o' or 'a,' it just might be an Italian wine." My classmates looked pleased. Teacher Hao showed us how to open a screw-top bottle with a discreetly closed fist that would "save face for the host." "And if you see a label in Chinese," he advised, "you definitely won't buy it, because it's not imported."

We tasted the Crozes-Hermitage, the Chianti Classico, the Barbaresco, the Tempranillo, the Freixenet, the sherry, and the port, and made a brisk survey of the brandy, whiskey, rum, and tequila. I was not a vigilant spitter, and by mid-afternoon I was feeling the hour. That was when we learned how to open a champagne bottle. "What's better—loud or quiet?" Teacher Hao asked.

David, a young maître d' with a trendy slab of a haircut, spoke up. "The quieter the better, like the gentle sigh of a beauty," he said. But the teacher pointed out, "Normally, in a bar they set up sparklers and open it loudly, so that the whole place knows who ordered it, like a show."

A classmate named Christina Cai stepped forward to open the bottle. She worked as a construction engineer building factories, and she wore khakis and a white safari-style shirt. Her husband, who manufactures dental products, was away on business, but they often drink wine together. ("Wine is alive," she told me later. "It's the combination of ideal weather, geography, and labor—just like a building.") The teacher handed her a bottle of Prosecco and warned her to keep control of the cork. Cai cradled the bottle warily, like a loaded M16, and I began to wonder about the wisdom of letting a lightly soused novice open a champagne bottle in a confined space. "What do I do now?" she asked nervously, and I felt my classmates lean away. "Can I loosen my hands?"

Pop! Cai shrieked, and then giggled. Wine flowed. She pulled out a camera and snapped a picture of the bottle. ◆

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Video: Osnos interviews Don St. Pierre, Jr.

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CANADIAN JOURNAL

FUNNY FOOD

Is a national joke becoming a national dish?

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

As a punch line, poutine has a lot going for it. Many Canadians believe that it is also good to eat. Their fondness for it is, in fact, often the basis of the punch line, since an outlander who hears a description of poutine in its basic form—French fries with cheese curds and brown gravy—is likely to think that it sounds, well, disgusting. Jokes about poutine on that level are the equivalent of jokes about the Scots eating haggis or Scandinavians in the upper Midwest crowding into church basements to feast on lutefisk—an ethnic ritual that my first taste of lutefisk moved me to compare to teenage circumcision. On a recent trip to Montreal, a city that is to poutine what Baltimore is to crab cakes, I asked a young woman I'd met there named Emily Birnbaum why poutine often struck people as funny. "Because it's so gross," she said. "After you finish a poutine, you say, 'I can't believe I ate that.' " It almost goes without saying that she was eating poutine as we spoke. So was I.

Poutine is associated with unhealthy eating and excessive drinking.

STEVE POWERS

Poutine was invented in rural Quebec—the time was roughly half a century ago; the identity of the inventor is the subject of some dispute, although a restaurant proprietor named Fernand Lachance is what detectives would call "a person of interest"—and for many years the humor about it within Canada could have been seen as a way of making a mildly deprecating jape about its home province. I live in Nova Scotia in the summer, and I've heard similar remarks about the fondness Newfoundlanders exhibit for pork scraps. In recent years, poutine has rapidly widened its range—although someone from Quebec who's tasting a poutine in Alberta is likely to appear disdainful, like a travelling salesman from Buffalo sniffing suspiciously at what a Southern California sports bar lists on its menu as Buffalo Chicken Wings. In addition to pointing out that the proper pronunciation is poo-TIN rather than the more commonly heard poo-TEEN, a Québécois would respond to, say, the use of shredded cheese rather than Cheddar-cheese curds the way a strictly raised Buffalonian would respond to wings served with cucumbers and Thousand Island rather than celery and blue-cheese dressing. At the cash registers of convenience stores in Quebec, a province that produces nearly half the Cheddar cheese in Canada, it is customary to find packages of cheese curds. If they're relatively fresh, cheese curds, which might be described as Cheddar before the taste is added, squeak when you bite into them—a phenomenon that, in the view of some upmarket cheese connoisseurs, remains their most appealing characteristic.

National franchise restaurants in Canada like Harvey's and New York Fries and Burger King now have poutine on the menu even in provinces that are overwhelmingly Anglophone. Toronto has at least one restaurant that serves virtually nothing but poutine—Smoke's Poutinerie, a start-up franchise that, following the trend of using the standard dish as a base to build on, offers twenty varieties, including double-pork-peppercorn poutine and curry-chicken poutine. Montrealers who feel a poutine yearning coming on while travelling in the United States have a chance these days of finding relief in upstate New York and northern New England and even on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Canadian chefs with national reputations often do gourmet takes on poutine, the way Wolfgang Puck and Alice Waters began some years ago to do gourmet takes on pizza. In Toronto, Wine Bar, which was originally owned by a prominent chef named Jamie Kennedy, has a poutine of the day on the menu—Local Organic Fries as Braised Lamb Poutine, for instance, paired with a glass of Bodega Estepa 2007 Pinot Noir. Commenting on the results of a nationwide survey last summer, Roy MacGregor, who often writes about Canadian identity in the *Globe and Mail*, wrote that one of the more surprising discoveries was the possibility that "the national food of Canada is now poutine": more of the survey's respondents, it turned out, had tasted poutine than had been in a canoe or seen a moose. If poutine is a joke, then, it may be a joke not just on Quebec but on the entire country.

A Canadian satirist named Rick Mercer used to do a series of television remotes known as "Talking to Americans," in which he asked Americans questions that revealed them to be pretty much oblivious of the huge, contiguous country that is their most important trading partner. He asked questions like whether Canada, which he described as a country without a seacoast, needs a navy or whether Canada should switch from its twenty-hour day (more minutes in each hour, of course) to be in line with the American twenty-four-hour day or what should be done about the Russian invasion of Chechnya and Saskatchewan. He persuaded Americans to sign petitions to stop the Toronto polar-bear hunt and put an end to the Canadian custom of leaving the elderly to die on ice floes. His best-known coup came during the 2000 Presidential campaign, when, having insinuated himself into a pack of reporters, he shouted out a question to George W. Bush: What was the candidate's response to the statement by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Poutine that Bush looked like the man who should lead the free world into the twenty-first century? Bush looked immensely pleased. "I appreciate his strong statement," he said. "He understands I believe in free trade. He understands I want to make sure our relations with our most important neighbor to the north of us is strong. And we'll work closely together."

During a visit to New York last spring, Calvin Comfort—a young man I've known since he was a child in Nova Scotia—told me that he ate poutine in Vancouver, where he now lives, but when I asked him if he ate it often he looked startled. "If you ate it often," Calvin said, "it would kill you." Some people find the almost brazen unhealthiness of poutine another opportunity for humor. The T-shirts offered for sale by a Web site called Montreal Poutine bear the legend "Body by Poutine." A poutine at Kentucky Fried Chicken has been measured by a weight-loss program called Keep Canada Slim at nine hundred and seventy calories, fifty-four grams of fat, and more than twenty-six hundred milligrams of sodium. Roy MacGregor called poutine a "concoction that should only be consumed by the heartless."

It is widely assumed that someone seen digging into a poutine has not come to the table directly from the gym: poutine has a strong association with late-night eating by young people who have had a lot to drink—either because it acts as what I've heard referred to as a "beer sponge" or because they're too drunk to know any better. Poutine's association with unhealthy eating and excessive drinking may be part of the reason that it is considered by some Montreal residents of relatively sophisticated tastes and mature years to be at least embarrassing and maybe beyond the pale.

On my recent trip, I saw three such Montrealers of my acquaintance—one of whom illustrated his lack of food snobbery by waxing eloquent about a place called Wilensky's, a lunch counter where you decide whether you want the top or the bottom of an onion roll wrapped around your hot dog. ("Give me a top," you say to the counterman, or "Give me a bottom"; I don't know what would happen if you said, "Give me the whole roll.") Two of these people, including the Wilensky's fan, made it quite clear that they had never eaten poutine, and the third said that she had tasted it once long ago. Her tone of voice was an indication that she considered poutine-eating to be, like text-messaging or attending heavy-metal concerts, an activity best left to the young. In the summer of 2008, when the invitation to the Canadian Embassy's Canada Day party in Washington depicted Samuel de Champlain, the founder of Quebec City, holding a bowl of poutine, Jean-Paul Perreault, the president of a Francophone advocacy group called Impératif Français, said that linking Champlain to such a crude dish was "contemptuous and unacceptable"—prompting the Embassy to issue an apology and causing some people who posted comments on the Toronto *Star's* Web site to suggest that Jean-Paul Perreault lighten up *un peu*.

I had a top at Wilensky's myself. The tops have the onions on them; I can't imagine why anyone would have a bottom. This was at lunch on the day I arrived in Montreal. It was a bifurcated lunch, since I also fortified myself with a smoked-meat sandwich at a legendary

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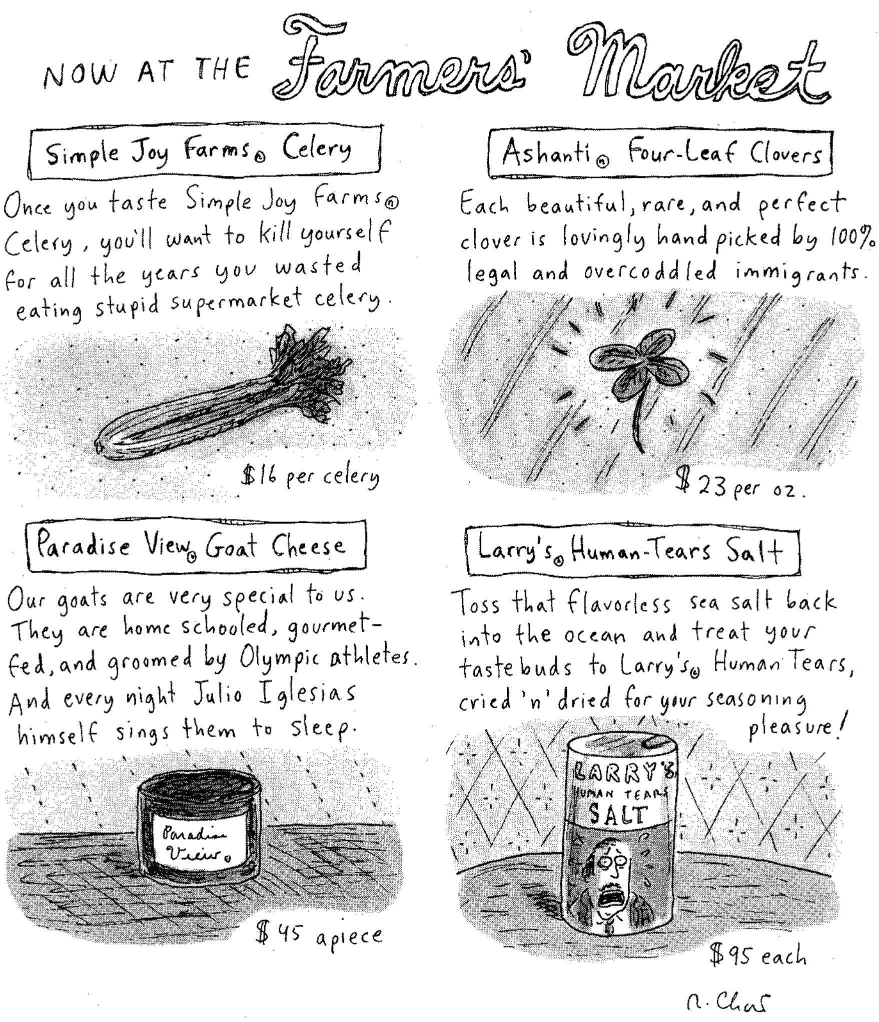
Montreal deli called Schwartz's. Before the advent of poutine, smoked meat was probably Montreal's best-known food, although the city has always had a collateral reputation for bagels. Smoked meat, which is similar to pastrami, has certainly not been chased from the field; Schwartz's still sells ten thousand pounds of it a week. Across the street, a restaurant called Main offers, on a menu otherwise dominated by delicatessen specialties, smoked-meat poutine. Eating a smoked-meat sandwich at Schwartz's was what I thought of as a tip of the hat to the old champ—the equivalent of having one beef-on-weck sandwich in Buffalo before turning to some serious chicken-wing consumption. I had come to Montreal to eat poutine.

I think I first saw the word "poutine"—in French-Canadian slang, it can mean "mess," among other things—ten or twelve years ago, on the menu board of the snack bar on the ferry that goes from Digby, Nova Scotia, to Saint John, New Brunswick. I was not tempted. With all due respect to the operators of that vessel, I have to say that I never went aboard without carrying my own food—a collection of Nova Scotia specialties that invariably included the peppered hot-smoked salmon sold in supermarkets in the Canadian Maritimes. In the summer, I snack on that salmon throughout the day, the way some people pop Tic Tacs. Poutine then more or less faded from my mind until about three years ago, when I found that Bud the Spud, a chip wagon that for many years parked in front of the main building of the Halifax library, was offering a version of poutine. Bud the Spud's French fries were always a favorite of mine. Some summers, I would catch myself concocting an unlikely errand in Halifax, an hour and three-quarters from where I live, just to get within striking distance of Bud the Spud. I was not willing to try a poutine rather than a bag of Bud the Spud's fries—I believe the word "adulteration" might have been uttered at the time—but Bud's decision to offer it in what had been a straight French-fries operation was an indication of the inroads it had made. By last summer, when I noticed that the takeout connected with the only store in our village had added poutine to its menu, it began to dawn on me that poutine might be on its way to becoming another icon in a country that often seems uneasy with the ones it already has.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As many Canadians see it, the mention of Canada to a foreigner, particularly an American, instantly conjures up images of hockey players, Royal Canadian Mounted Policemen, lumberjacks, igloos, and, of course, canoes and moose. The list goes on, but it does not include a national dish—unless you count maple syrup, which is customarily poured on something else, or the entire Tim Hortons doughnut chain. Canadians, of course, are hardly hostile to hockey players—when asked in surveys what makes them particularly proud of their country, they tend to name hockey, followed by multiculturalism (which they envision as a lumpy stew rather than a melting pot) or the national health-care system—but many of them resent being defined by icons. "The Rant," a Molson beer commercial that captivated the country in 2000 and still appears on T-shirts, began, "Hey. I'm not a lumberjack, or a fur trader. I don't live in an igloo or eat blubber or own a dog sled." Given poutine's inelegant reputation, I wondered how Canadians would take to having it added to the icon list. I also wondered what it tasted like.

That's right: at that point, even though poutine had advanced to within a short bike ride from where I live in the summer, I had never tasted it. The questions posed by connoisseurs in taking the measure of a poutine—Do the French fries and curds stand up to the assault of the gravy? Does that gravy taste like something that originated somewhere other than in a packet? Are the curds squeaky-fresh?—were for me strictly theoretical. Last spring, on a trip to Toronto, I decided to take the plunge. This was at a chip wagon that parks in front of City Hall. There is actually more than one chip wagon parked in front of City Hall, and my tipsters had instructed me to try the blue one marked "Halal." It turned out to be run by an immigrant from Afghanistan.

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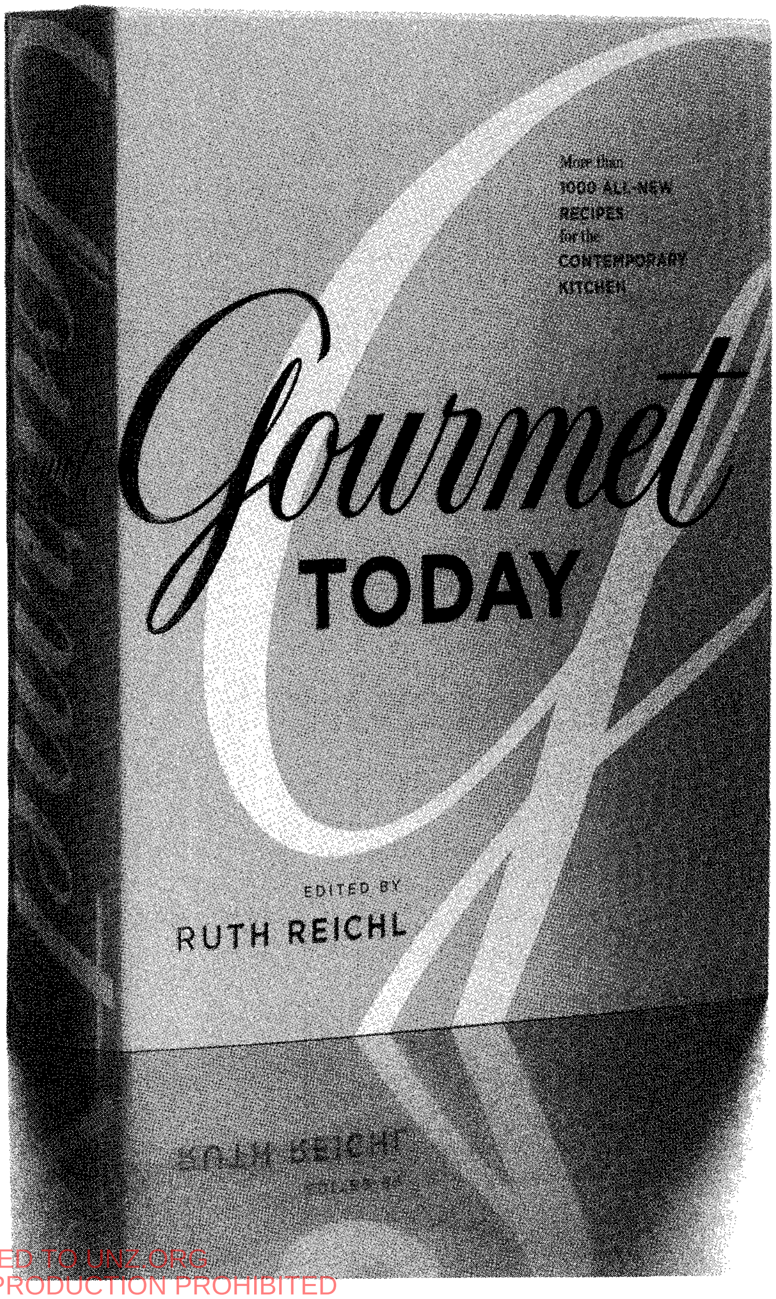
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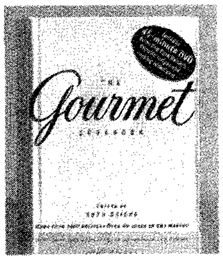
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before you came to Toronto?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Russia."

Cautiously, I tasted the Afghan's poutine, which was the basic fries-curds-and-gravy dish without embellishments. My response was similar to the response I'd had some years ago when the composer Ezra Laderman, despite knowing full well that few euphonious sounds had ever been coaxed out of a shofar, wrote a fanfare for shofars that I heard played at the dedication of the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale: "surprisingly inoffensive."

It was obvious, though, from the writings of the cognoscenti, that a true sampling of poutine would require a trip to Montreal. That is how I came to be eating so much of it with Emily Birnbaum and her boyfriend, James Braithwaite, and their friend Richard Parks, and a revolving selection of special-guest eaters. It was a thirty-or-under crowd, the prime demographic for poutine-eating—possibly because young people are able to stay awake until the key poutine-consuming hours arrive. ("I never get the pang until after 3 A.M.," James told me.) We began that first night with an unembellished poutine at La Belle Province, a chain that, despite being a good distance from New York, appears to have retained the same interior-design team that gave us the Port Authority Bus Terminal. "This is just to set the baseline," James said. At Paul Patates, we ate Poutine Italienne, the most common variation on the theme; it is essentially spaghetti with tomato sauce, except that the spaghetti is French fries. We ate the smoked-meat poutine at Main. At Maamm Bolduc, we ate Poutine Galvaude—poutine with chicken and peas. At Resto La Banquise, a twenty-four-hour operation that offers twenty-five varieties of poutine, we toyed with the idea of ordering a Poutine T-Rex or a Poutine Elvis but finally decided on a Poutine Kamikaze—merguez sausage, hot peppers, and Tabasco. "So many poutines, so little time," I murmured, between mouthfuls. At Chez Claudette, we had another Galvaude, as well as a Fermière (sausage, bacon, onions, mushrooms) and, just to show that we weren't being cavalier about the benefits of a healthy diet, a Poutine Végétarienne.

We ate at the sort of simple diners that in Quebec are called *casse-croûtes* and at hip outdoor cafés and at a drive-in that was the shape of a three-story orange and, as a sort of boffo finale on my last evening in Montreal, at a trendy bistro called Au Pied de Cochon, where we had foie-gras poutine. On the way to Au Pied de Cochon, a guest eater named Adam Leith Gollner, who has done some writing about poutine in Montreal, pointed out that Poutine Galvaude shows the culinary influence of Quebec Anglophones—cousins of people accustomed to menu items like Mushy Peas. It occurred to me that Poutine Italienne can be seen as a tribute to Montreal's substantial Italian population. Main is not by any means the only restaurant in Montreal that serves a poutine with smoked meat, a delicacy that originated, of course, with Eastern European Jewish immigrants. It wouldn't surprise me to see Asian poutine in British Columbia and maybe even Ukrainian poutine in patches of what Canadians call the Prairies. In other words, poutine might be an appropriate national dish for a country that prides itself on lumpy multiculturalism—whatever impact it has on another point of pride, the national health-care system.

So what if it's also a punch line? As one reader wrote on the Toronto *Star's* Web site during the dustup over Champlain and poutine, "Isn't the ability to laugh at yourself an indication of an evolved culture?" Also, I had to admit that some of the poutine we'd eaten—say, the Galvaude at Chez Claudette—was better than simply inoffensive. It may not have been mere coincidence that Claudette had been nearly our final stop. It occurred to me that during my three days in Montreal we had eaten poutine with increasing gusto. I suppose what I'm saying, at the risk of providing another T-shirt motto for the Montreal Poutine Web site, is that poutine grows on you. ♦

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Calvin Trillin eats poutine.

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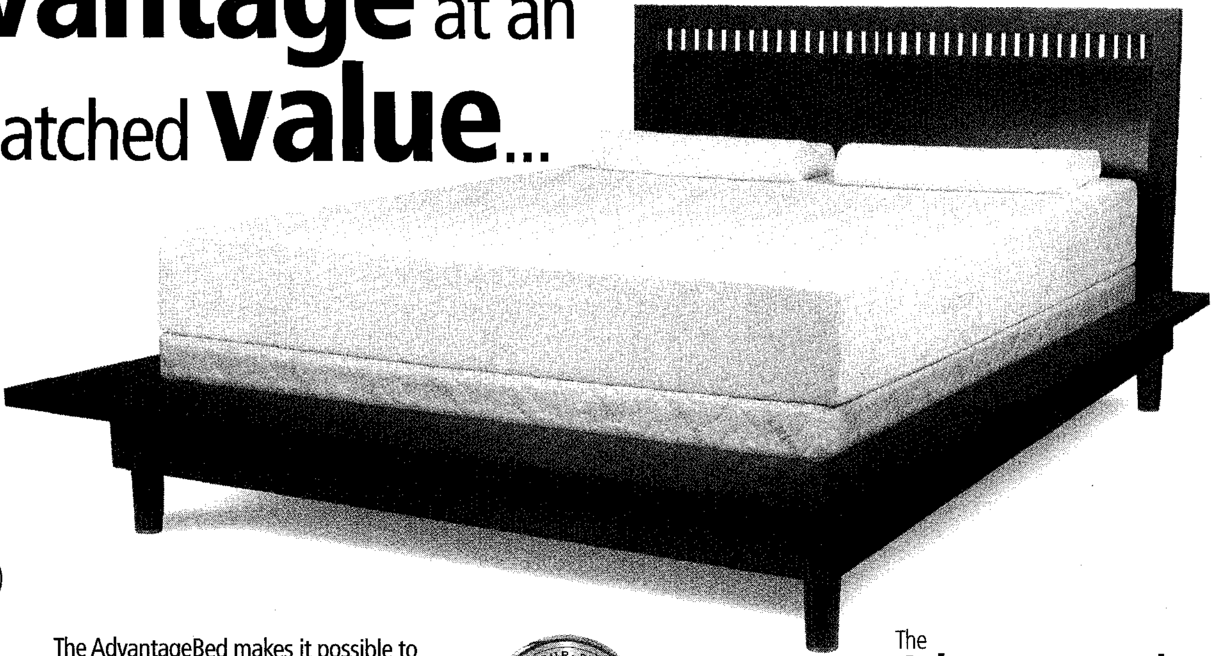

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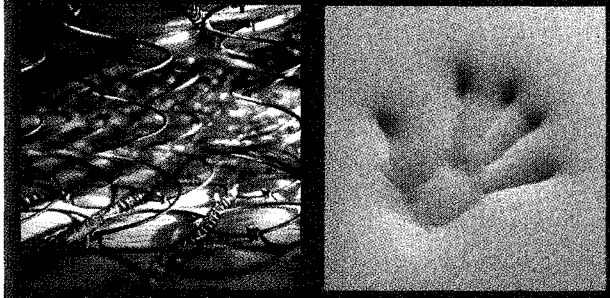

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PERSONAL HISTORY

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Thanksgiving without borders.

BY JANE KRAMER

Some stoves are made for Thanksgiving. My stove in New York is one of them. It has six burners and two ovens, which began to coöperate, more or less, in 2002, after five years of stealing each other's heat—with the result that the people who love sweet potatoes (my daughter, for one) and the people who can't manage Thanksgiving without mashed potatoes (my son-in-law) are finally happy, along with the ones who demand Brussels sprouts (my husband) and the ones (I won't mention them) who ask for string beans. I am the only person at my Thanksgiving dinner who insists on braised red cabbage, but then I am the cook with six burners and two ovens, and I always get it.

I bought my stove with Thanksgiving in my head. I imagined large birds, basted and browning nicely at four hundred and twenty-five degrees in one oven, while apple and pear cakes rose, untroubled, at three hundred and fifty in the other, and the stock for my bourbon gravy simmered on top, surrounded by pots and pans of everyone's favorite fixings. There was some discussion at home about the price of my new stove, but I didn't listen. By my logic, I was saving money, having dropped my longstanding campaign to replace the painted-plywood kitchen shelves with serious maple cabinets. The stove arrived in the fall of 1997, and broke down for the first time a month later, on Thanksgiving Day, leaving sixteen irritable people eating tuna sandwiches and cranberry sauce at two long laundry tables from the building's basement which I had squeezed diagonally, end to end, across my dining room, disguised under my mother's creamy Belgian linens, circa 1930. The emergency repairman appeared in February. With my stove functioning again, I had what would now be called a transformative thought: Thanksgiving but not Thanksgiving. No one would get to vote on the Brussels sprouts or veto the cabbage. No one could say "What? No turkey?" if my corn-bread-and-pecan stuffing came spilling out of a couple of juicy capons instead of a turkey that was bound to be stiff by the time it was carved and on a platter. No one could possibly sniff if the sweet potatoes turned out to be butternut squash—so much lighter—cooked in crème fraîche and maple syrup, with a dab of chipotle sauce. No one would be disappointed if the pies and cakes transmogrified into an apple charlotte out of Julia Child, or even a plum pudding, spared that Christmas, when the family voted *bûche de Noël*, albeit with a side of hard sauce.

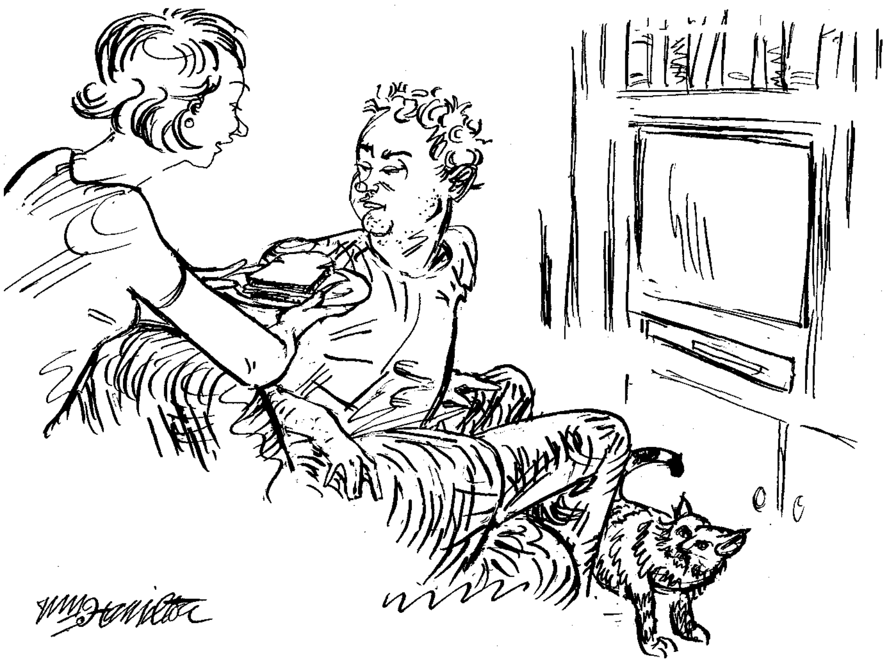
The next morning, I got on the phone and reassembled my Thanksgiving table for the last Thursday (a traditional touch) in February, at eight o'clock (a civilized one). Everyone called it the best Thanksgiving dinner they had ever eaten, perhaps because the people gathered at my table that slushy February night included an English historian, an Italian judge, a German politician and his wife, and two French journalists. They were all fine sources in my writing life, but none were what I would call heavily invested in the menu offered up at the beginning of a brief Pilgrim-Indian rapprochement that, if it lasted at all, was mainly owing to the good manners of a party of Wampanoag braves, who, having diligently gorged on wild turkey for three days at the Pilgrims' harvest feast (by all accounts, in early October, 1621), burned off the calories deer-hunting in the Cape Cod woods—thus keeping the Plymouth colony in meat for the long winter. The capons were splendid, though not, as my family said, something you would have found lounging on a rock in seventeenth-century Massachusetts—which probably explains why, when I suggested capon again in November, I was voted down.

A few months ago, when my husband and I were driving to Paris from the farmhouse in Umbria where we write in the summer, we stopped in the village of Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay, in Burgundy, for dinner at the restaurant L'Esperance, and over a drink at the bar afterward I mentioned those annual family votes to the owner and chef, Marc Meneau. He snorted at the word "turkey." He was bewildered, he said, by America's devotion to turkey. "*Un plat bas*," he called it. "*Pas du tout festival.*" He would have voted capon—a plump Bresse capon that had spent the last two months of its life reclining on cushions in a private cage and eating soft, "secret" food—but when I pressed him he allowed that if he were forced to serve a turkey he would stuff it with *petit-suisse* cheese and sautéed apples, simmer it *sous vide* for an hour, and then roast it, with little basting splashes of Perrier to brown the skin. I wrote it all down.

I am what you might call an *amateur* of Thanksgiving. My family prefers the phrase "regrettably hospitable," but I would add strategically hospitable, because Thanksgiving dinner has turned out to be the stealth weapon of my reporting life. Everybody knows something about Thanksgiving, though not necessarily what we eat or why we eat it. The word has entered the global lexicon; like Mickey Mouse, Elvis, and Obama, it opens doors. I discovered this as a young reporter, attempting to interview a Berber woman in a tent encampment a few hundred miles into the western Sahara, where I was pursuing a misbegotten story about nomadic women's rights. Her name was Fatma, and she was squatting beside a charcoal brazier, cooking her family's dinner and answering my questions about oppression with the terse forbearance of an earthling suddenly confronted with a chatty alien, when I thought to ask her what

WAYNE THIEBAUD

The problem with cooking Thanksgiving dinner abroad is never just the shopping. It's the local culinary aesthetic.



"Here—now you're a couch potato au gratin."

• •

was in her pot. She said it was goat—or, rather, pointed to a goat tethered outside her tent—and, smiling for the first time, asked if Americans ate goat at "the big feast of the hunters and the Christians." We talked for an hour, through my increasingly bewildered (male) interpreter, during which time I learned that there was no word for "feminism" in her language, or, for that matter, for "recipe." But she knew about the big feast. I stayed for the goat. It was very tasty.

By now, I can say that most of the people whose lives I've invaded since then, notebook in hand, sooner or later asked me about the big feast, and, if they didn't, I told them. (The exceptions tend to be politicians, who, being not much given to what I would call a fruitful exchange of thoughts, will talk about food only if it's their food and reflects highly on their status: Silvio Berlusconi, say, enthusing over the white truffles slathered on his pasta, or François Mitterrand, whose bird of choice was a two-ounce songbird, plumped for a month on figs and millet, drowned in Armagnac, and then roasted and eaten whole, beak optional, with your head draped in a linen napkin—the better to inhale the perfume of steaming brandy.) The subject of food, and kitchens and cooking, can lull even the most reluctant and suspicious people into conversation, and when I add Thanksgiving, where the food is not only plentiful but familial and friendly, to that conversation, they will shed any lingering doubts as to my good intentions and tell me what I came to hear. But it also means that at the end of the day, when my notebooks are full, I tend to be so overcome by the sense of friendship I have engineered—or so grateful, or perhaps so guilty—that I invite everyone to join my family for a Thanksgiving dinner. Anytime. Anywhere. Sometimes they come. Once, our doorman buzzed on Thanksgiving morning to say that my "guests" had arrived from Italy. I opened the door to a rustic couple whom I had last set eyes on years earlier, writing about a group of Communist peasants with a dairy coöperative (you turned in your cow, and got back a stock certificate with her name and her snapshot on it). They had recently sold their farmhouse to a rich German, left the Party, and, never having been on a plane before, decided to take me up on my invitation. They picked at the food. The next night, I made spaghetti.

I inherited my Thanksgiving strategy from my mother. It is said that families produce a good cook, or a good gardener, only every second generation, but, given that I am a good cook and my daughter a spectacular one, I have to assume that we are correcting a generational imbalance—making up for the fact that my mother, whose talents lay more in pruning rosebushes than in stirring pots, was a terrible cook and my grandmother worse. My mother's one culinary achievement was a bland but passable Thanksgiving dinner. (Her stuffing was onions, celery, white bread crumbs, and a pinch of salt.) But it was memorable compared with what usually passed for culinary excitement in Providence, Rhode Island, in the Eisenhower fifties—a place where ordering Frenched chops at the butcher was considered flashy or, as my mother put it, "something they do in New York." And part of what made it memorable was the collection of hungry foreign people—professors from Brown, musicians in town for a concert, war-refugee doctors my father had met on his hospital rounds—who sat in our dining room then, praising my mother's stuffing as something exotic and American, or, you could say, *authentically* bland. It was a beautiful room, a room for feasting—the result of years of assaults on estate sales and hapless dealers who, as she liked to say, arriving home with a twenty-five-dollar cache of Georgian silver or an eighteenth-century Connecticut corner cabinet, "didn't know what they had." After she died, I moved almost everything in her dining room to my apartment in New York, hoping to move the spirit, if not the stuffing, of those Thanksgivings with them. My husband is an anthropologist, and it took a while for all that mahogany and silver to settle in with the Sepik River ancestor masks and assorted Pacific totems in their new room, but, once they did, I wrote "Thanksgiving" on a manila folder and started clipping recipes.

My stuffing began as a recipe from the *Times*, circa 1974: onions, green bell pepper, and celery hearts, sautéed in butter, mixed with corn bread and some crumbled toast, and bound by a cup of chicken broth and a few raw eggs, according to the yellowed page that is now disintegrating between my daughter's Indian-pudding recipe and one for parsnip-and-pear purée. (Thanksgiving that year was "Southern," the paper said, "plus a few trimmings of European inspiration"—which may or may not explain the red cabbage I started making then.) The stuffing has expanded over the years, with my kitchen confidence, to accommodate sausage, orange juice, parsley, thyme, sage, and an extravagant amount of toasted and chopped pecans. It is still expanding, but in 1976, when I got out my mother's stuffing spoon and served my first Thanksgiving dinner at her table, I followed every recipe I used down to the quarter teaspoon. Clearing out a closet the other day, I discovered a box of snapshots from that Thanksgiving, taken by my friend and, at the time, downstairs neighbor Jane O'Reilly, who had appeared at my door at nine in the morning, bearing fresh coffee cake to fortify us for a long day's cooking. One of those pictures is on my desk now; I am basting what looks like a twenty-pounder, balanced precariously on the open door of the oven that preceded my new stove. There are children and dogs underfoot, and grownups hovering with pot holders and coffee cups in their hands. We are all laughing. Thanksgiving looks easy, and it probably was, back in those early feminist days before the idea of the perfect meal invaded the heads of otherwise accomplished women, convincing them that voluntary servitude in the kitchen was the secret of their liberation.

At last count, I have cooked Thanksgiving dinner in seven countries, starting with Morocco. The year was 1968. The city was Meknes. The bride—me—was cooking without benefit of silver, recipes, or a table. And the groom, deep in field work with a brotherhood of hospitable Sufi curers and musicians who danced their patients into trance in amiable, if occasionally bloody, exorcistic rituals, had decided, by way of reciprocation, to introduce them to Thanksgiving. Our larder, when I got this news, consisted of bread, Boulaouane wine, and several sacks of eggplants, Meknes being some months into an eggplant season that threatened to last all winter—and did. I had never tasted an eggplant in Providence, or, for that matter, at Vassar, where I went to college. My first experience with eggplants was in New York, at graduate school, and they were still as exotic to me as my mother's stuffing was to the Europeans at *her* Thanksgiving table. I had already made grilled eggplant, tagine with eggplant, couscous with eggplant, soup with eggplant, and even eggplant stuffed with eggplant, and whenever I was tired of eggplant we would drive to Rabat for a steak smothered in pizzaiola sauce—the specialty of a restaurant called La Mamma, which was frequented that fall mainly by diplomats who were also tired of eggplant but not, in my experience there, by Sufi exorcists. So I made do.

I concocted an eggplant flan so thick with onions, cheese, and spices that the taste of the eggplant faded, though not, I have to admit, into the taste of red cabbage or sweet potatoes or Brussels sprouts. Everybody said they liked it. They said they liked my chicken, too—the only poultry within a hundred miles was chicken—and even my stuffing, which I had put together with onions, dates, and flatbreads from the local market. We sat in a circle on the floor (around a large brass platter that, along with a rug, two cushions, and a straw-filled mattress, amounted to the family furniture) and scooped up everything with our fingers, just like Pilgrims and Indians, and drank a good deal of mint tea and told stories. I would count that Thanksgiving as my first success. If the Sufis were a bit bewildered by my household arrangements—men and women eating together, sharing the best parts—they were too kind to say so. I was known thereafter, and not without affection, as the woman who chopped up bread and put it inside her chickens instead of leaving it on the platter, to wrap around the eggplant and sop up the sauce.

Over the next several years, I managed to cook some semblance of Thanksgiving dinner whenever I was off reporting, trying to win the hearts and minds of unlikely people. The worst was a dinner I put together in Södertälje, Sweden, in the fall of 1975, for the families of three Yugoslav workers from the local Saab-Scania factory. It wasn't the food that failed. My cranberry (well, lingonberry) sauce was good, and the turkey, fresh from my babysitter's boyfriend's mother's oven, across the street, even better. But my guests, as history soon showed, didn't really think of themselves as Yugoslavs. They thought of themselves as Serbs, Slovenes, and Croats, and, while they had always been agreeable and even effusive when we talked alone, they were not in the habit of breaking bread together. The conversation was, putting it nicely, strained; it flowed with the slivovitz that the men had brought, and each of them brought two bottles. They were close to brawl-

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SCARIEST TACTICS

ing when the Slovenian's wife opened a box of homemade pastries—flaky, buttery mille-feuilles layered with thick whipped cream. Peace returned to the kitchen table in my borrowed flat and lasted until, flushed with compliments and brandy, she smiled at the Serbs and Croats and said, "Slovenians make the best cakes."

Then, there was the Thanksgiving dinner I cooked for a family of Ugandan-Asian refugees in Southhall, an outlying London neighborhood where, in the early seventies, tens of thousands of South Asian immigrants lived. I shopped with the lady of the house—who, having vetoed a turkey of suspicious provenance (Harrods), had ordered her own from a halal butcher—and cooked in her tidy kitchen, monitored by her son, an excruciatingly pious eleven-year-old who, on his imam's instructions, had stayed home from school to glare into my pots and pans, hoping to catch his mother and me in some unpardonable culinary indiscretion. (I repressed the urge to sneak some bourbon into his mother's roasting pan, to capture the last sticky bits, and then into the pot of gravy, where all the alcohol would have evaporated in eleven minutes at a brisk simmer: a trick I had learned from a New York neighbor who had learned it in A.A.) My daughter, who was in London with me—"missing a whole month of important peer-experience," her nursery-school teacher had protested—still remembers the perfume of Gujarat spices rubbed into turkey skin, and I came home with the recipe that transformed my dull creamed spinach into a marvellous saag paneer that I still serve, though not, admittedly, with Thanksgiving turkeys.

But none of my foreign Thanksgivings were as strange as the one I cooked in 1990, on the Rue du Cherche-Midi, in Paris, where I kept an apartment-cum-office for sixteen years. It wasn't the food. I had shopped for a week. There were no mice sheltering behind the stove, as there had been the Thanksgiving before. (They roasted, sadly, with the turkey.) And I had discovered a table leaf in the *cave*, which gave me the space to invite fourteen people, if some of them brought chairs. The problem was my guests and their finicky European palates. The teen-age son of some French friends sat down, announced that he ate only "white things," and helped himself to the lion's share of turkey breast and mashed potatoes. My daughter's boyfriend of the moment, a German student she had acquired on her last vacation, explained that *he* ate only "separate things"; he tackled his dinner dish by dish, disappearing into the kitchen after each one to wash his plate. My husband insists that the banker at his end of the table actually divided his meal into three mysterious sections—on the same plate but not touching—and ate them separately. I hadn't noticed. By then, I was at the *glacier* on the Rue du Bac, buying vanilla ice cream.

The problem with cooking Thanksgiving dinner away from home is never just the shopping, though that can drive you crazy: buttermilk (for corn bread) in Italy? chipotles in France? fresh pecans in Germany? The problem is what I would call the local culinary aesthetic. (Reinold Kegel, who cooked at the American Academy in Berlin when I was a fellow there, read up on the big feast and, inspired by the idea, and perhaps by the availability, of pumpkins, produced a Thanksgiving dinner that, barring the turkey, was almost entirely orange: pumpkin soup, pumpkin purée, pumpkin pie.) The fact is that a lot of Europeans are like my daughter's friend. They find it at best peculiar, and at worst revolting, to be expected to sit down to a groaning board of Thanksgiving dishes and, more to the point, to eat them smushed together into one big glorious taste—preferably under enough gravy to insure that no food, as it were, sits alone. They like their tastes one at a time. Try going to a Chinese restaurant with a Frenchman or an Italian; he will order separately, guard his plate, and refuse to share his lemon chicken in exchange for a helping of your Hunan beef. One Frenchman I know even cleans his fork with an alcohol wipe between courses, and I remember a Thanksgiving in Umbria where two of my neighbors paled when I handed them pumpkin ravioli and turkey on the same plate. "In Italy, we eat our pasta *first*," one of them said tartly—after which they swept their turkey back onto the serving platter, and proceeded to do just that.

Last month, thinking about that Thanksgiving, I called up Ron Suhanosky, who owns the restaurant Sfoglia, across the Park from me in New York, and asked him how he cooked "Italian" Thanksgivings for his customers. He said he didn't. He took his family to Nantucket; brined a turkey for four days; stuffed it with hazelnuts, "drunken prunes," and sweet Italian sausages; and generally "put a spin on Thanksgiving that's Italian." Homemade mostarda. Raw-kale salad. Brussels sprouts with crispy mortadella. A crusted sweet-potato sformata (he described it as "kind of a sweet-potato quiche") with béchamel, bread crumbs, Parmesan, and cream. And for dessert, his wife's department, Italian bread pudding or a panna cotta. It sounded good—all but the part about "no gravy, just a drizzle of olive oil."

Then, there is the problem of whose turkey you are cooking. A good French turkey is either a wild turkey, shot on the wing, or a turkey raised especially for Christmas—which amounts to the same thing: eight or nine pounds at most. And in Paris those eight pounds can set you back a hundred and fifty dollars, because your butcher knows that at Christmas the French will spend as lavishly on fish, fowl, caviar, foie gras, and champagne as we do on stocking stuffers and prime ribs. Last summer, I asked my friend Catherine McGurn, a French dentist married to an American lawyer, if she had ever found a turkey big enough to satisfy the Americans in the Paris office of her husband's firm. She consulted a notebook in which she had recorded the menus, and travails, of her Paris Thanksgivings, and told me, "Once. 1991. Seventeen pounds." She said that the Americans ate everything in sight, down to the last cranberry and sweet potato, while the French friends whom she'd invited "took these little plates" and nibbled politely at everything except her stuffing, which they wolfed down, recognizing it as the same stuffing (known grandly as La Farce) they eat at Christmas: *pain de mie* mixed with pork sausage, ground veal, crumbled chestnuts, foie gras, and truffles. The McGurns live in Rome now, a city that, from the point of view of Thanksgiving, makes Paris seem like Plymouth.

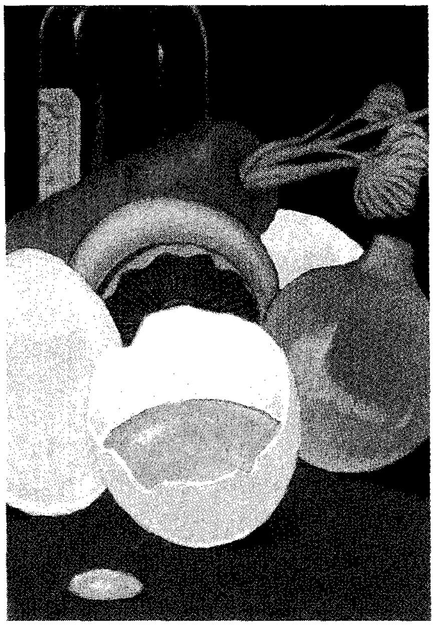
IMPROVISATIONS BY ANTHONY LANE

EGGS

There is a character, Alex, in T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party," who is able to conjure a supper from next to nothing. Many dishes, he boasts, can be made with "a handful of rice and a little dried fish," and, in that spirit, he disappears into the kitchen, nipping back in to fret about mangoes and curry powder. At last, he returns to announce his finest concoction to date: "Never, even when travelling in Albania,/Have I made such a supper out of so few materials/As I found in your refrigerator. But of course/I was lucky to find half-a-dozen eggs."

And so we reach the numb, honest horror that is the lot of the improvisational cook. Alex may be proud of his talents, but Eliot is careful not to specify the resulting dish; just as Euripides was obliged, by the dictates of his era, to cordon the slaughter of Medea's children offstage, so any modern audience would recoil in outrage if it was forced to witness the actual coddling of an egg. Or how about *oeufs en meurette*? The ingredients are universal: eggs, an onion, a carrot, slices of white bread, and any old mushrooms and bits of bacon you find lurking, plus half a bottle of leftover red wine. One version even suggests a "thumb sized piece of dark chocolate," at which point the stomach slowly starts to turn. You might as well add a genuine thumb. As for the moment when you lift the eggs, poached and quavering, from the dense, red-brown slop of the sauce, lay them on the mattress of toast, and watch the yolk rupture and spool into the surrounding murk, why, even Euripides would have to look away.

Oeufs en meurette is a classic ad-libber's meal, in that, even when it goes right, it looks like something that has gone terribly wrong. We who approach our kitchens with ham-fisted dread must defy the Alexes of this world—those breezy souls who can reach into cupboards, rifle among the cereal boxes, and come back forty minutes later with a plate of Tunisian lambs' jowls, heightened with pomegranate seeds. Like seasoned gigolos, such people know only of success, repeated every night with subtle variation; they talk of "mastering" the art of cooking, whereas most of us are lucky to be its slaves, scalded and swearing, doomed to tiptoe along the verge of failure. They are the kings of time, too, wisely marinating their salmon for twenty-four hours, already savoring the triumph to come, while we splash on the fish sauce, the lime juice, and the tarlike lees from the bottom of the soy bottle, poke the flesh with a stub of lemongrass for ten minutes, and then, as much from sheer boredom as famine, head for the stove.



PIERRE MORNET

Hence the prominence of eggs. To the improviser, home from a day's toil, the eternal conundrum—Which came first, the chicken or the egg?—is no debate at all. For there is no chicken. There was some, last Thursday, but by Sunday it was fit only for Atlanta, Georgia, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention might find some use for it. Open any fridge, though, and you face the ovoid challenge: boil me, fry me, scramble me, lower me into wine and chocolate, I don't care. Come on, baby, crack me up. This is sound advice, and man can indeed live by egg alone, although after a while he may become a stranger to his own bathroom. It is the temptation to elaborate—to riff on the basic eggy tune—that spells disorder and shame. Many an omelette, enriched with withered herbs and anonymous meat, greets the palate like a baseball mitt.

Once, at the peak of student poverty, I tried, with a friend, to make *spaghetti alla carbonara:* an eternal standby, and yet, like clay modelling, never as easy as it seems. We had the following: incorrect pasta, eggs, bacon, butter (softened and rehardened many times, like a moral principle), and not cream but whole milk. A true carbonara, in any case, requires no cream; it uses olive oil instead of butter, and pancetta rather than bacon; above all, it asks that you remove the pan from the heat before mixing pasta and egg. This we did not do. We just tossed everything together and cranked up the gas. At that point, the egg went bananas. It clung to every strand of pasta in a tough yellow fur, so that what landed on our plates resembled a precise, magnified model of what would happen to our arteries if we went ahead and ate it. What proper chef could manage such pleasing symmetry? What snooty Alex would know the joy of our *tagliatelle al fiasco*? Sometimes I can taste it, even now. ♦

Last winter, finding herself in Paris the day before a belated holiday dinner, she flew home with a hundred Belon oysters in an ice bag in her suitcase, along with some good French cheeses, rillettes, *pâté de campagne*, and a couple of blocks of foie gras from Les Landes. The lawyers in Rome loved it. No one noticed that there was no bird.

Last summer, I decided to try another Thanksgiving dinner in Italy. Don't ask why I was even thinking about Thanksgiving—in Italy, in the heat, with a deadline looming and the garden outside my windows full of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, basil, garlic, arugula, baby lettuce, and a dozen other fresh, ripe, lovely Italian things that I can only dream about, at home in New York, in November. Or how I was going to cook it, given that my Italian stove is even more temperamental than my New York stove ever was. True, it also has two ovens, and the bigger one—call it the turkey oven—also stopped working in 1997; the difference is that my Italian oven still sits there, twelve years later, waiting for the technician who can figure out how to fix it. As for my stovetop, it is made entirely for pasta. There is a huge burner in the middle—which ignites with a whoosh of flame that laps at the handles of even the tallest pots and has to be coaxed down into submission before you can turn around—surrounded by four tiny burners whose only possible purpose is simmering pasta sauces that have already taken an hour or two to heat.

Still, it would be my first summer Thanksgiving anywhere. I was determined to cook it. The only summer Thanksgiving I had ever been to, let alone cooked, had taken place in 1974, at Mary McCarthy's house in Castine, Maine, to celebrate Richard Nixon's resignation. Mary was a serious hostess and a splendid cook, and, more to the point, the only other person I knew who served Thanksgiving dinner out of season. Even her stuffing was splendid, despite the fact that there wasn't a trace of corn bread in it. On the other hand, she was not given to sharing recipes. (Years later, when we were neighbors in Paris, I ate it again at one of her November Thanksgivings, and asked her to write it down. She smiled sweetly and said, "No, I don't think so.") But the thing I remember most about her Castine Thanksgiving was how easy she said the marketing had been: she had called a farmer, ordered a sixteen-pounder, and three days later it was there.

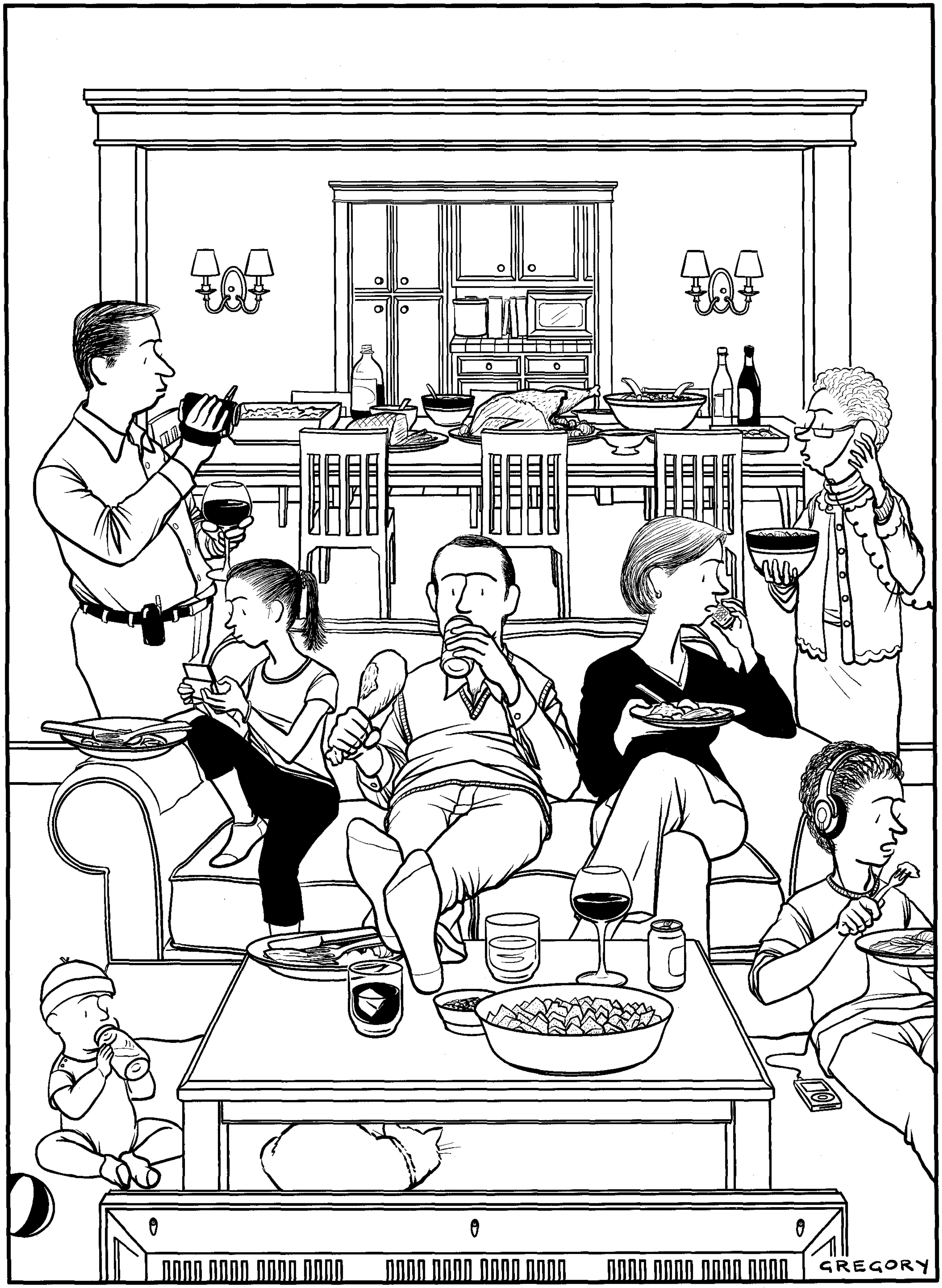
The bad thing about good memories is how cheerful and optimistic they can leave you feeling. I was going to find the finest turkey in Italy—or, at least, a turkey as good as hers—and with that in mind I got in the car, drove two hours from my house to a parking lot under the Borghese Gardens, and made my slow way, by taxi and foot, through Rome to the Via della Maddalena, where I asked Angelo Feroci, arguably the city's best meat and poultry purveyor, to find me a sixteen-pound turkey for July or August. Feroci looked astonished. "Impossible," he said. His turkeys were not only Christmas turkeys—"Come back in December," he told me—they were *Italian* Christmas turkeys, which is to say, "younger and smaller and better" than anything the French ate. Then I remembered: most good butchers in Italy frown on large turkeys; it is a matter of reputation. They call them "poor food," because birds like that are usually raised in feed yards—not to sixteen pounds but to fifteen or sixteen kilos, which translates as thirty-five pounds of old Tom turkey—after which they are sliced thin, packaged, and sold cheaply in supermarkets as *petti di tacchino*. (Those slices are so ubiquitous that even the peasants who refuse to distinguish between a duck and a goose, at least if they happen to be selling one—or, for that matter, who refer to all squash, from pumpkins to zucchini, as *zucca*—admit that turkey is turkey.) They are the kinds of turkeys my husband remembers from the Army, which may be why turkey is not his favorite food. The farmers who supply places like Feroci's would never raise one; the farmers competing with feed yards to supply my local co-op, in Todi, would never consider anything smaller. Their feeling, which dates from centuries of poverty, is "the bigger the bird, the more people it can feed." (They feel the same way about vegetables. This year, I rescued a twenty-inch cucumber from the back of my vegetable garden. I had thought it was a skinny watermelon until the gardener said, "Cucumber, almost ready to eat.")

I asked Feroci what he told the Americans in Rome who wanted Thanksgiving turkeys. He told them, laughing, "Invite fewer people, or order two." He allowed that he had been ordering "Christmas turkeys" for November since the early sixties, when Burt Lancaster, who was filming the interiors for "The Leopard" at Cinecittà, walked in and asked for one. There was some discussion. Feroci won the first battle—seven pounds, no bigger—but he couldn't persuade the actor to let him bone the bird and stuff it with, among other good things, prunes and pistachios, ready to be cooked and cut across into "pretty slices, full of colors inside." Now, he says, his customers get "pretty" or none at all.

That was June. I was still searching for a sixteen-pounder in July, when an old Paris friend and fellow-journalist named Merete Baird decided to fly to Italy with her husband for a long weekend. She asked if I needed anything from Paris, and I heard myself saying, Yes, a turkey. My husband was horrified, but Merete is Danish—which is to say, exuberant in the face of a challenge—and she said, "Of course." Her turkey travelled, like Catherine's oysters, in a thermos bag in the luggage hold, and, despite its hours in airport taxis, French security checks, and Italian baggage claims, smelled fine when I unwrapped it. I set the table on the porch for eight people and began to cook. At seven and a half pounds, it just fit into the little oven where I had been doing my roasting for thirteen years, and I had thought to buy a bottle of bourbon for the gravy. Sadly, there were no pumpkins in my garden yet, or even canned pumpkin at the co-op, and, given the refrigerator-life expectancy of a bird that had just emerged from the hold of an Air France jet, there was certainly no time to persuade a dairy farmer to ferment a couple of cups of milk into *latte acido*, or soured milk, which, I had just discovered, was close enough to buttermilk for a corn-bread stuffing.

I searched my memory for the tastes in Mary McCarthy's stuffing. I spent the morning trying to reconstruct it. It was not a success. But I managed to transform my sweet-potato purée into a

SKETCHBOOK BY ALEX GREGORY

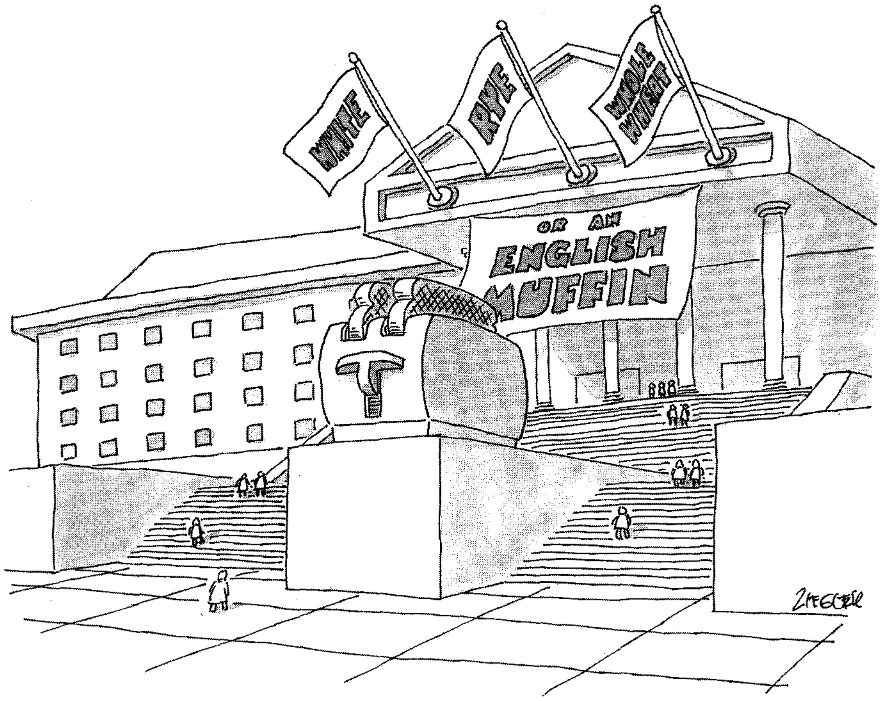


carrot purée—there were young carrots in the garden—with molasses that someone had brought from New York years earlier standing in for the maple syrup, red peperoncini for the chipotles, and fresh cream from the dairy for the crème fraîche. I brightened some local spinach with beetroot greens. I made grits, with Sardinian Pecorino—the nearest thing I could find to a sharp Cheddar—using the last bag of stone-ground cornmeal that I had brought from New York, since, for reasons I have never pierced, Umbrians stop cooking with cornmeal at the summer solstice, and it virtually disappears from the market shelves. But I couldn't claim credit for the apple-and-*frutti di bosco* crumble, steeped in Maraschino liqueur—my friend Lin Widmann, an Anglo-Argentine painter from a long line of English pudding fanatics, made that—or even for the French turkey, which I have to admit had been born delicious.

Given the success of my little July Thanksgiving—I thought of it as a trial run—I scheduled a big Thanksgiving for August 7th. I looked for a new oven. I visited poultry farmers. I tried to negotiate the slaughter of one of the sixteen-pounders I would always see, strutting like teen-agers, in their back yards. I held out ridiculous sums of money, but I could not shake the farmers' conviction that you don't slaughter a bird that will double in size, and yield, in a matter of four months. Their answer was always the same: "Too small. Not ready." Marketing is not what I like to do in Umbria. Unless I am off somewhere on a story, I don't do much of anything that can't be done within a mile of home. I sit on the porch steps and watch the sun rise. I smile at sunflowers. I sit at my desk and write. Toward the end of the afternoon, I check out my figs and my pots of basil and marjoram—Umbrians love marjoram and will not touch oregano—thyme and parsley, and then I tap my way through the vegetable garden with a big stick (Umbria is viper country) and a basket, and head for the kitchen to chop and slice whatever I've carried back. At night I cook it. Once in a while, I will drive north to Todi and pick up a chicken or a guinea fowl at the co-op, or south to Avigliano for mussels or *spigola* at the local fish store. But if you had asked me, in July, where in Perugia or Terni to find a big new oven that would fit between the counters that flank my stove I wouldn't have been able to say. And if you had asked me where to find a farm-raised sixteen-to-eighteen-pounder I would probably have cried.

By then, I had exhausted two Italian provinces in my turkey quest. So I crossed the Monti Martani (a massif best known as the epicenter of the earthquake that toppled the ceilings of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in 1997) to consult with my friends Joanna Ross and Bruce Adgate. The Rossgates, as they are sometimes called, have been an Umbria resource since the day they decided to quit their jobs in New York—Joanna was a theatre agent and Bruce an actor with Ellen Stewart's La Mama theatre company—to move with their ten-year-old son to Eggi, a village near Spoleto (where Bruce had spent three summers performing Euripides in the mid-seventies). They went to work restoring a fifteenth-century village house, best described at the time as a pile of stones, and in the process unearthed a bread-and-pizza oven, just outside the wall of their son's bedroom. The oven was falling apart, but they peered into its cavernous beehive chamber and immediately thought Thanksgiving, or, as Bruce puts it, "Getting it back in shape went right up there with plumbing and heat as one of my high priorities." He worked on the oven all summer, making pizzas. By November of 1993, he was able to roast a Thanksgiving turkey for ten people. (His biggest turkey, to date, weighed thirty-seven and a half pounds, and thirty-five people spent the better part of two days polishing it off.) In July of 2009, he volunteered his oven for my next Thanksgiving, and, more to the point, his services at the oven, because just firing it up—feeding it wood until the embers turn red and the bricks lining it white hot—takes four or five hours of skilled hard labor and leaves you drenched, even in November. In August, you *start* drenched.

So I moved Thanksgiving across the mountain. I stopped looking for an oven, and a few days later, when Joanna called with the news that she and Bruce had prevailed on their butcher to find a farmer willing to part with a turkey for fifteen or sixteen people, I stopped looking for a bird, too. We made a guest list of American friends who lived in or around Spoleto and would be spared having to cross a mountain after a feast that, according to Bruce, promised to last past midnight. We made a shopping list. Bruce, whose Thanksgiving specialty is pumpkin pie, came home that night with the first pumpkin of the season. Joanna discovered a dusty bottle of maple syrup at the back of a shelf in a discount supermarket called Sabatini,



which didn't surprise me; she can find anything, and what she doesn't find she grows. We were in countdown mode when Naomi Duguid, the Canadian food scholar and cookbook writer I had got to know on assignment last year, e-mailed to say that she was flying to Italy that week. I invited her to Thanksgiving and, of course, gave her the rest of my shopping list. She arrived at night, on August 5th, and emptied a suitcase full of rapidly defrosting cranberries on my kitchen table, along with a sack of pecans, two jars of chipotles, three cans of organic pumpkin, and homemade crackers for the cooks. Dinner was pasta al pesto (my basil pots) and salad (my garden) tossed with oil from my olive trees, and it left me thinking how much simpler life would be if the Pilgrims had been Italian.

The next morning, we drove to a farmers' market for spinach and dandelion greens, and then to my favorite Todi *salumeria* to discuss with the salumerista's wife the pros and cons of faro or chestnut flour for my stuffing bread. It was our *festa del ringraziamento*, I told her, only a little early. She considered my problem for a minute, disappeared into the stockroom, and emerged with a two-pound sack of local cornmeal, stamped "To be eaten by June 21, 2009," which she had been saving for herself. ("Of course you can use it," she said.) By lunchtime, I had started a pumpkin purée, and Naomi, having discovered three plum trees on the hill behind my kitchen door, had managed to bake two plum cakes and a loaf of bread and to produce a mysteriously spiced and soured cranberry sauce, which, she assured me, was much prized in its original incarnation as a sour-plum sauce in Georgia (the republic, not the state). Lunch was salami, prosciutto, creamy Campania mozzarella, garden tomatoes, and cucumber salad; it emptied the fridge. The afternoon meant corn bread. The recipe I had found, tearing through cookbooks, seemed a little off—six eggs, for one thing—but it looked easy, and, more to the point, it was the only one without buttermilk. I should have known better. When Bruce and Joanna crossed the mountain that afternoon with maple syrup for my purée, giblets for my gravy, fenugreek seeds for Naomi's cranberries, and fresh pumpkin for Bruce's pies, they found us crumbling burnt cornmeal goo onto a cookie sheet to dry.

Eggi is a walled medieval village tucked into one of the Apennine foothills, with a road that winds up to the church and then turns into a path—which is to say that to get to the Rossgates' house you walk. We were three people, a very large dog, my grandmother's turkey roaster, which I had carried on a plane from New York ten years earlier (turn-of-the-twentieth-century pans were made to last), and six big and extremely heavy Le Creuset pots, bought on the last day of a going-out-of-business sale in Todi and one of them filled with what was left of my gravy stock, which had splashed and splattered all over the back of the car by the time we parked. Ullie, the dog, licked up the gravy. The climb, pot by pot, in the August sun, took twenty minutes. The first thing I saw, walking up the steep stone steps to the Rossgates' house, was a fiendish circle of flames leaping out of the enormous mouth of the pizza oven, and Bruce, with a bottle of cold white wine and a pair of long iron tongs, waiting for me in a deck chair.

I fled up to the house, where Naomi was already at work, doctoring our greens with spices from Joanna's larder, and Joanna herself, an inspired cook, was slipping a paste of pancetta, garlic, and rosemary under the skin of a perfect turkey that covered most of her kitchen table. Her mother had just arrived, bearing a case of prosecco, and she and her husband were sitting in the garden, filling glasses for the first guests. They came, like Indians, with offerings—everything from caponata and olives to platters and decorations. Big cardboard turkeys were soon perched on the garden tables, their tails unfolding into a kaleidoscope of crêpe-paper pleats. The trees were draped with the Rossgates' Christmas lights, and a string of big gold letters—"HAPPY THANKSGIVING"—was dangling between two pergola poles, waiting for a breeze.

The bricks turned white by the end of the afternoon. The turkey slid into the oven. Bruce covered the mouth with an iron sheet, to seal in the heat, and the two of us settled into the deck chairs, poured some wine, and told Thanksgiving stories. (I have to admit that Bruce's were better, given that in the past five years he and Joanna had managed to pull off credible Thanksgiving dinners in Mexico, Vietnam, and Argentina and were planning to do it again this year in Laos.) From time to time, he would pull on the thickest mitts I had ever seen, lift the sheet with his tongs, prod the roasting pan into a half-turn, and, from a safe distance, fling some wine over the bird to baste it. People drifted down from the garden, watched for a while, and disappeared back up the garden steps. It has to be said that I was not much use that evening as a sous-chef. My one attempt at flinging wine into the fiery maw of the pizza oven fell at least a foot short of the roasting pan. On the other hand, Bruce was spared all my Thanksgiving-in-New York anxieties: should the bird be lying on its back in the pan, or upside down, or on one side and then the other? Should it be falling apart from "slow cooking," or turning crisp from a quick run, legs and wings akimbo, under a blast of electric heat? Should it be basted with butter, or wrapped in a cloak of wet cheesecloth, or left to smolder under a paper bag? Our eighteen-pounder—roasting, by Bruce's calculations, at somewhere between seven hundred and eight hundred degrees—was golden-brown, tender, and on its platter in not much more than an hour. The pots of pumpkin purée and doctored stuffing went into the oven to reheat. I poured some bourbon into the roaster. It sizzled into a juicy sauce, which brought my gravy pot close to brimming, and ready to carry upstairs.

It turned into a fine night. A soft breeze blew in from across the Spoleto valley and set the "HAPPY THANKSGIVING" fluttering; the chimes in the garden trees came to life. I forgot the work of the past few weeks and joined the party. The best thing about Thanksgiving is that it is always worth it. Everyone agreed on that. In fact, we decided to do it again, next summer. We toasted Thanksgiving at midnight with what was left of the wine and a bottle of Jack Daniel's that the Rossgates had stashed for the occasion. I fell asleep in the car and dreamed of leftovers, going home. ♦

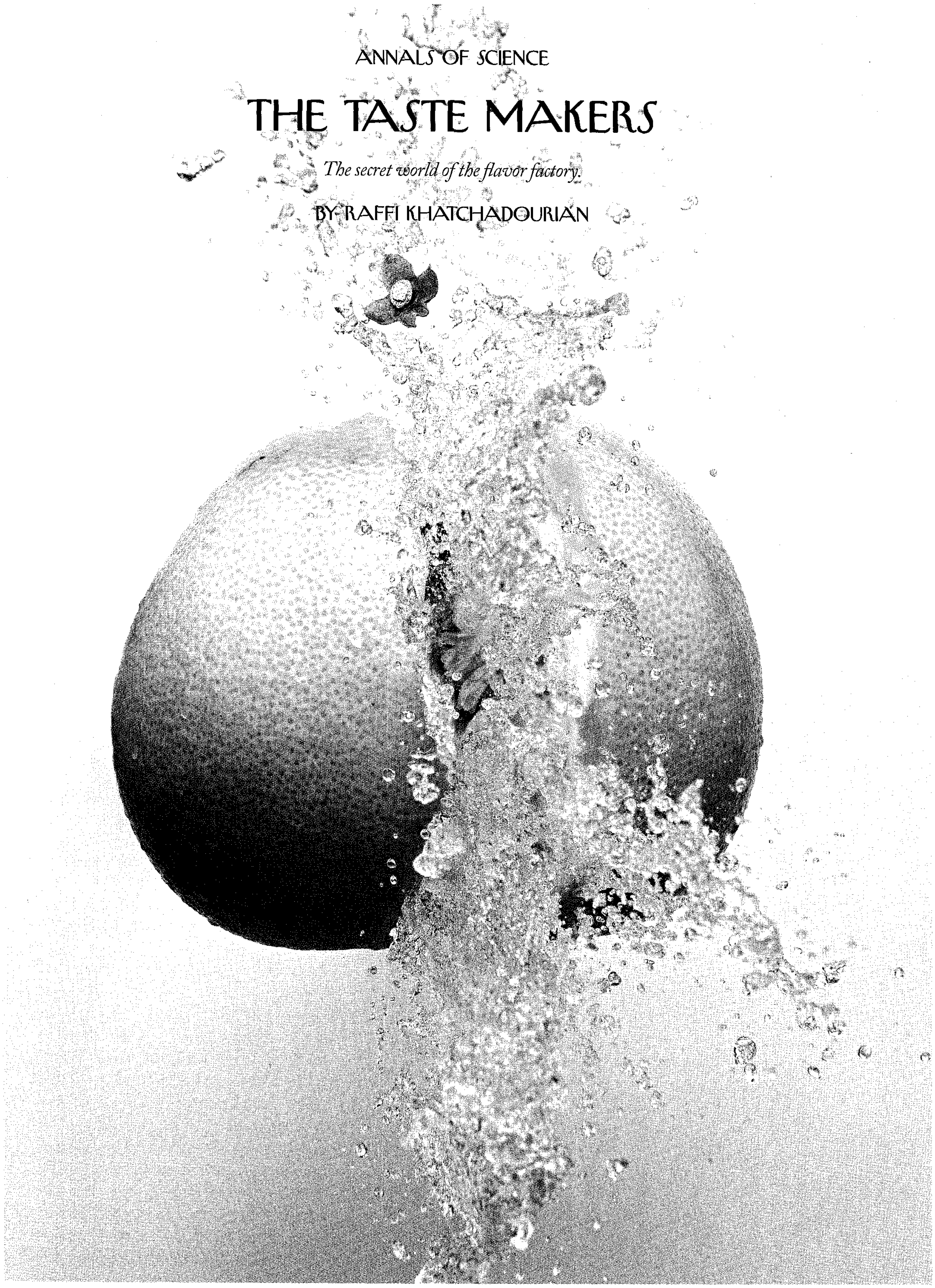
Much of Givaudan's business—which generates nearly four billion dollars a year—is built on deceiving our senses when we eat. Th

ANNALS OF SCIENCE

THE TASTE MAKERS

The secret world of the flavor factory.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN



nsumption of food flavorings is one of the modern era's most profound collective acts of submission to illusion. Photographs by Hans Gissinger.

Growing up, Michelle Hagen lived near a large factory in Cincinnati that produced what she and her sisters called The Smell. The aroma was dynamic and unpredictable, almost like a living thing. On some hot summer days, it was thick and sweet, and when it drifted over Hagen's neighborhood—a series of row houses by the interstate—it was as if molasses had been poured through the streets. At other times, the smell was protein-rich and savory. Many of the odors triggered specific associations—birthday cake, popcorn, chicken-noodle soup—and they stayed with her. In 1992, Hagen went to the University of Cincinnati to study art, but she soon turned to science, majoring in biology. She never imagined that she would end up working in the factory that made The Smell. The factory belongs to a Swiss company called Givaudan, the largest manufacturer of flavors and fragrances in the world, and upon graduating Hagen got a temporary job there that soon grew into something permanent. After three years of gruelling apprenticeship, she became a flavorist, a job that admitted her into a kind of secret society. There are fewer than five hundred flavorists in the United States, and they almost never speak about their work outside their laboratories.

Hagen is thirty-five. She is a brunette, with straight hair that falls just below her shoulders. She is not thin, but her face is, and it lights up easily. She prefers things that are vivid. Beneath her lab coat, Hagen is sure to be wearing some bright-hued article of clothing—a scarf, a sweater. She holds her hair back with sunglasses, in summer and in winter. After spending even a short time with her, one can't help but think of Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka, who believed that the manufacture of flavors—particularly the sweet and flashy ones that go into candy, chewing gum, and marshmallow—demands a childlike openness. At the end of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," Wonka tells Charlie Bucket that an adult could never run his factory. "Mind you, there are thousands of clever men who would give anything for the chance to come in and take over from me, but I don't *want* that sort of person," he says. "I don't want a grown-up person at all." But Wonka surely would have hired Hagen. Her office resembles a walk-in high-school locker, if such a thing existed. The walls are covered with magazine clippings, photographs, and Post-its; a clock-size Swatch with a blue kangaroo painted on it; and a dry-erase board with lists of words meant to inspire flavor creation ("baobab," "jujube," "mamoncillo"). Tacked here and there are paint chips from Benjamin Moore, which she once used as aides to memorize the aromas of approximately a thousand chemicals. California Lilac was ethyl isovalerate; Mellow Yellow was gamma octalactone.

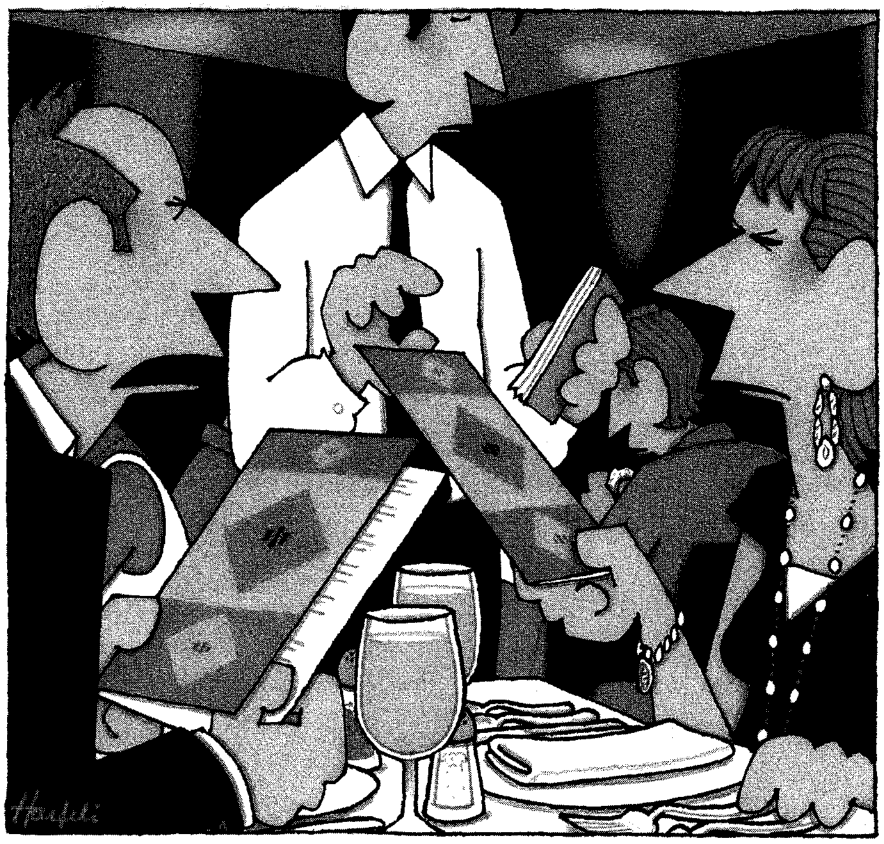
If you like sports drinks, or something with açaí or pomegranate or huckleberry on its label, you may well have tasted one of Hagen's creations. Naming the products that contain her flavors, however, would undermine the confidentiality agreements that Givaudan keeps with its clients, and elicit a severe reprimand. Several years ago, a Givaudan employee attending a convention accidentally let slip to a reporter for *Beverage World* that the company had made a vanilla flavor for Coca-Cola. After the comment was published, Givaudan executives acted as if a state secret had been breached: they investigated the leak, restricted all information about their business with Coke to employees working directly for the company, and flew to Atlanta to visit the Coca-Cola headquarters and apologize in person. In the world of flavor, it is not enough to keep secret a chemical formula. (Typically, these formulas are not patented; hence the obscuring use of "natural flavoring" as an ingredient—and an omnipresent riddle—on food labels.) The Givaudan employee who attended the convention had broken a more fundamental rule. Few of the companies that sell processed foods or drinks want the public to know that outside laboratories supply them with flavors. Even after Snapple's founders admitted to me that, more than twenty years ago, a Brooklyn-based company named Virginia Dare had designed the flavors for a line of sodas that Snapple has long since discontinued, people at

"We have ways of making you talk."

Virginia Dare refused to discuss the matter.

Such secrecy helps shape the story of our food. It encourages consumers to think of processed foods as fully formed objects, rather than as assemblages of disparate components. It treats a brand as sacrosanct. (This is not the case in all industries: Dell openly acknowledges that the processors for its computers come from Intel.) Perhaps this kind of deception is necessary because eating and drinking are such elemental experiences. Our evolutionary forebears did not have to wonder about the supply chain of, say, an apple, and many of us today seem unwilling to register the complexity of industrial foods.

More than half of Givaudan's business—which generates nearly four billion dollars in revenue a year—is built on deceiving our senses when we eat. The consumption of food flavorings may stand as one of the modern era's most profound collective acts of submission to illusion. When you watch a movie or look at photographs or listen to an iPod, you tend not to forget that what you are taking in has been recorded and re-created for you in some fashion. Flavor additives are no less a contrivance; in fact, flavor re-creations typically have less fidelity than digital photography or MP3s. They more closely resemble paintings: subjective creations, made by people who work in competing styles. There are the hyperrealists, who strive for molecular-level precision; the neo-primitivists, who use centuries-old palettes of extracts and essential oils; the Fauvist types, who embrace a sensually heightened sensibility. Placed in the context of art history, the flavor industry today would be in its modernist phase, somewhere in the waning days of Cubism, for even the most outlandish flavor concoctions take direct inspiration from the real world. Whereas a perfumer can invent commercially successful aromas that are totally nonrepresentational—a Pollock in a crystal bottle—the flavorist must still respect the deeply held conservatism that people tend to hold when it comes to putting food in their mouths. Snapple's use of kiwi-strawberry flavoring in a juice drink may seem unusual (and the sum flavor of it may barely approximate real strawberry combined with real kiwi), but we can imagine that the flavor is authentic—that it captures some platonic gastronomic truth.


"Don't try to distance yourself from my choice of entrée."

For Hagen, the boundaries of realism are something to be pushed. She spoke to me with admiration of Miró's "Prades, the Village"—"I love the electric colors, the contrast of abstract to real, and the beautiful indigo sky in that painting"—but she could just as easily have been talking about her own artistic creations. Her flavors are charged, odd, playful, personal. One day, she plans to try slipping a touch of menthol into a butterscotch flavor, or something similarly unexpected into blueberry—something "interesting, that makes you think." Not long ago, I asked her about the sorts of flavors that she mulled over at the edges of her imagination. She responded by e-mail: "Every year, my old high-school friends and their spouses and I take a long weekend in the fall to hang out in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. There are no kids and lots of beer. We stay up late playing cards or games. I usually get up really early one morning to see the sunrise over Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I like to make coffee, sit out on the deck, and listen to the silence. The forest is majestic and usually blanketed by a thin, rolling fog over its beautiful autumnal colors. On our last trip, while I was awaiting the sun, I remember thinking what a cool flavor this moment would make. I would use a zesty lemon base to represent the sun; I would add notes of cedar and pine to include the essence of the forest, and just a hint of phenolic vanilla, which would symbolize the smoky, white fog."

In January, Hagen flew to Riverside, California, and took a cab to the Mission Inn, where Givaudan had reserved rooms for thirteen members of its staff. The hotel was to serve as a staging ground for a commercial flavor-hunting expedition—what the company calls a Taste Trek—which had been organized to study exotic citrus varietals in the area. Citrus flavors, particularly those in the orange family, are among the most popular in the world, and in 2005 Givaudan conducted a yearlong, worldwide study to map consumer preferences in citrus and identify "white spaces"—combinations of different flavor attributes, such as nuttiness and floralness, that people enjoy but that are unavailable in an existing product. Fewer and fewer beverage companies develop new flavors on their own, even as they are fiercely engaged in what can only be called the Great Flavor Rush. The fight over white spaces in the supermarket aisles has grown so furious that grocery shelves are lined with bottles promising baroque exoticism: energy drinks and waters laced with kiwi-dragonfruit, or hibiscus-orange, or jackfruit-guava, or agave-melon, or clove-cardamom-cinnamon. This is fine by Hagen. "The flavors that I create are white-space flavors—out there," she said.

The citrus trek had already generated interest from key clients, among them some of the largest beverage companies in the world. What Givaudan's team was hoping to find in Riverside was a flavor that told a story. Studies have shown that when a flavor is marketed to consumers as a specific botanical type—evocative of a place or a culture, or complete with some peculiar tale of discovery—people are more likely to enjoy it. For instance, "Georgia peach" is preferable to "peach," even if there is no real difference. Givaudan was not looking to create a juice, although many juices contain natural flavoring—even ones that would not seem to, such as Ocean Spray's 100% Juice Cranberry & Blueberry. Rather, the company was looking for something more abstract: botanical inspiration. Its discoveries would lead to the creation of nutritionally vacant additives that could be deployed in all manner of processed food, from soft drinks to ice cream. With few exceptions, even the most artificial-seeming flavored products (Tang) are based on things that are natural (orange juice). Hagen told me, "I try not to have any preconceived notions of what to expect. There aren't a lot of things that haven't already been discovered, but Mother Nature is a great flavorist."

In Riverside, oranges have long been a grand romantic calling. The city took root in 1870, when a group of Midwestern abolitionists settled at the foot of a sand-colored pile of stone they later named Mt. Rubidoux. Two years later, Luther Tibbets and his wife, Eliza, arrived from Washington, D.C. They were odd: Luther wandered about in a hat trimmed with a woman's veil, to cover his face; Eliza followed a Swedish mystic and entered trances. The Tibbetses ordered a few Brazilian navel-orange trees and planted them on their land. According to legend, one was trampled by a cow; Eliza nourished the others with dishwater. They bore fruit, and that is how the California citrus industry began.

In 1907, the University of California established the Citrus Experiment Station in Riverside, on a plot of land in the foothills of Mt. Rubidoux. Scientists working with the university collected samples of oranges, and also lemons, limes, pomelos, mandarins, and their botanical cousins, to see what would thrive in Southern California's sun-baked soil. A hundred years later, the collection's groves have more than a thousand plant varieties, including oddities from the Far East, such as the Buddha's Hand, a citron that looks like it has been crossbred with a squid. The groves—now named the Citrus Variety Collection—are one of the largest and most diverse of their kind, and serve as a national repository for citrus germplasm. Many of the fruits there are legendary, such as the Meyer lemon, which was collected in China by Frank Meyer, who travelled as far as Turkestan and Manchuria in search of plants. A compulsive wanderer, he mysteriously drowned in the Yangtze in 1918, while travelling with specimens.

Meyer would have appreciated Givaudan's Taste Treks. Since 1999, the company has conducted them in Africa, Latin America, and the Far East. The first expedition began at a large open-air market in Libreville, Gabon, and ended in a remote logging camp deep inside a rain forest known as the Forest of the Bees. The team spent weeks exploring the jungle floor, and combed the canopy in a hot-air balloon. Givaudan's researchers sampled hundreds of species with the intention of translating their taste or fragrance into flavors, and even attempted to record the ambient aroma of the rain forest itself before sunset. (Givaudan's equipment proved incapable of registering it.) The team identified a dozen plants as having commercial potential. *Landolphia owariensis* has been used for rubber, arrow poison, and drugs for treating epilepsy and dizziness; it bears an aromatic red-spotted fruit, and led to the invention of a Givaudan flavor called "jungle fruit." The team also created "Gabonese pineapple" from the bristly orange berries of *Diospyros mannii*, a species akin to ebony. The researchers discovered varieties of tree bark that, when crushed into powder, tasted either like onion or like garlic, and they took samples of wild ginger containing aframodial and labda-8(17),12-diene-15,16-dial—molecules that were later analyzed in Givaudan's laboratories and patented for their ability to intensify both the pungency of spicy foods and the cooling sensation that spearmint and peppermint create in your mouth. The compounds also enhance the taste of alcohol, making low-proof spirits seem stronger; recently, Givaudan put them to use in a well-known liqueur.

It was a little past eight in the morning when Hagen and the rest of the Givaudan team entered the Citrus Variety Collection. The sun had not yet become intense, and the air was crisp, laced with the aroma of desert flora. (The exhaust from I-91, which runs between the groves and Mt. Rubidoux, had not yet thickened into smog.) Hagen wore a broad-brimmed hat and held a spiral notebook. With her were members of Givaudan's marketing staff, Ph.D.s in organic chemistry, and a research scientist who had brought a device—consisting of tubes, filters, and a small bell jar—designed to capture the aroma, or "headspace," of unpicked fruit. This device can make molecular-level recordings of just about any fragrance, but the results require labor-intensive analysis, so it is used sparingly. There was a Givaudan flavorist from Amsterdam, a man of precision in comportment and in language, who told me that he was a "supertaster" capable of registering bitterness with unusual acuity. And there was Jim Hassel, a chemical engineer from New York—tall with graying hair and a Brooklyn accent—who had designed a blockbuster flavor called CitraFresh Lime, and whom Hagen regarded as a kind of guru. "Jim goes very, very, very deep in citrus," she told me. Not long ago, he created a flavor for an American

IMPROVISATIONS BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

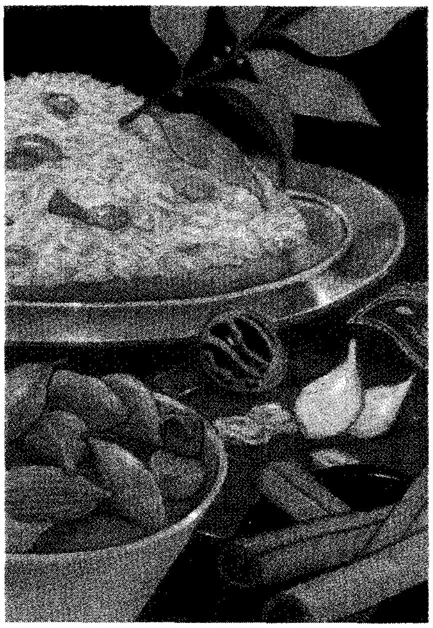
RICE

My father, seventy-eight, is a methodical man. For thirty-nine years, he has had the same job, cataloguing books for a university library. He drinks two glasses of water first thing in the morning, walks for an hour every day, and devotes almost as much time, before bed, to flossing his teeth. "Winging it" is not a term that comes to mind in describing my father. When he's driving to new places, he does not enjoy getting lost.

In the kitchen, too, he walks a deliberate line, counting out the raisins that go into his oatmeal (fifteen) and never boiling even a drop more water than required for tea. It is my father who knows how many cups of rice are necessary to feed four, or forty, or a hundred and forty people. He has a reputation for *andaj*—the Bengali word for "estimate"—accurately gauging quantities that tend to baffle other cooks. An oracle of rice, if you will.

But there is another rice that my father is more famous for. This is not the white rice, boiled like pasta and then drained in a colander, that most Bengalis eat for dinner. This other rice is pulao, a baked, buttery, sophisticated indulgence, Persian in origin, served at festive occasions. I have often watched him make it. It involves sautéing grains of basmati in butter, along with cinnamon sticks, cloves, bay leaves, and cardamom pods. In go halved cashews and raisins (unlike the oatmeal raisins, these must be golden, not black). Ginger, pulverized into a paste, is incorporated, along with salt and sugar, nutmeg and mace, saffron threads if they're available, ground turmeric if not. A certain amount of water is added, and the rice simmers until most of the water evaporates. Then it is spread out in a baking tray. (My father prefers disposable aluminum ones, which he recycled long before recycling laws were passed.) More water is flicked on top with his fingers, in the ritual and cryptic manner of Catholic priests. Then the tray, covered with foil, goes into the oven, until the rice is cooked through and not a single grain sticks to another.

Despite having a superficial knowledge of the ingredients and the technique, I have no idea how to make my father's pulao, nor would I ever dare attempt it. The recipe is his own, and has never been recorded. There has never been an unsuccessful batch, yet no batch is ever identical to any other. It is a dish that has become an extension of himself, that he has perfected, and to which he has earned the copyright. A dish that will die with him when he dies.



PIERRE MORNET

In 1968, when I was seven months old, my father made pulao for the first time. We lived in London, in Finsbury Park, where my parents shared the kitchen, up a steep set of stairs in the attic of the house, with another Bengali couple. The occasion was my *annaprasan*, a rite of passage in which Bengali children are given solid food for the first time; it is known colloquially as a *bhath*, which happens to be the Bengali word for "cooked rice." In the oven of a stove no more than twenty inches wide, my father baked pulao for about thirty-five people. Since then, he has made pulao for the *annaprasans* of his friends' children, for birthday parties and anniversaries, for bridal and baby showers, for wedding receptions, and for my sister's Ph.D. party. For a few decades, after we moved to the United States, his pulao fed crowds of up to four hundred people, at events organized by Prabasi, a Bengali cultural institution in New England, and he found himself at institutional venues—schools and churches and community centers—working with industrial ovens and stoves. This has never unnerved him. He could probably rig up a system to make pulao out of a hot-dog cart, were someone to ask.

There are times when certain ingredients are missing, when he must use almonds instead of cashews, when the raisins in a friend's cupboard are the wrong color. He makes it anyway, with exacting standards but a sanguine hand.

When my son and daughter were infants, and we celebrated their *annaprasans*, we hired a caterer, but my father made the pulao, preparing it at home in Rhode Island and transporting it in the trunk of his car to Brooklyn. The occasion, both times, was held at the Society for Ethical Culture, in Park Slope. In 2002, for my son's first taste of rice, my father warmed the trays on the premises, in the giant oven in the basement. But by 2005, when it was my daughter's turn, the representative on duty would not permit my father to use the oven, telling him that he was not a licensed cook. My father transferred the pulao from his aluminum trays into glass baking dishes, and microwaved, batch by batch, rice that fed almost a hundred people. When I asked my father to describe that experience, he expressed no frustration. "It was fine," he said. "It was a big microwave." ♦

"I know where the bodies are buried. I buried them."

• •

beer which has generated tens of millions of dollars in sales.

Everyone walked over to a tree bearing Allspice tangelos—a hybrid of a tangerine and a grapefruit—which had lumpy exteriors, like lizard skin, and spongy rinds. Hassel described what to look for when evaluating a specimen. "You've got the essential oils in the peel," he said. "I always like to scrape the peel first, just to see what the essential oil is like. That is one aspect of the fruit. The second thing, obviously, is the juice. They can be very similar and very different, and in citrus processing we always separate the oil from the peel, and then the juice from the fruit. You never want the two to meet, because the acid in the juice will chew up the peel oil." Essential oils have been distilled from spices and other botanicals since at least the Middle Ages, later gaining wide use as natural flavorings. Hassel told me that the reason for this was stability. It doesn't take long for juice to rot, but oils, especially when refined, have a longer shelf life. (It takes a ton of lemons to press about six pounds of lemon oil.) Slices of tangelo were passed around, and Hassel dug his nail into the rind, which yielded droplets of citrus oil. He then brought the rind to his nose and inhaled. The oil, he said, wasn't especially aromatic.

Hagen was holding a slice to her nose, too. "To me, it is sweet mandarin," she said. "Light lemon."

"Not too much anthranilate, right?" Hassel said, referring to a family of chemicals commonly found in grapes and strawberries.

"No," Hagen said. "Sweet orange. Light lemon."

Hassel inhaled again. "Not too tart," he said.

"Certainly no allspice in there," Hagen said. "It's a misnomer."

Hassel said that he had expected the fruit to contain compounds that have malty, yeasty flavors, some of which are found in Gouda cheese, but they weren't there. Unimpressed, he tossed the slice away.

Hagen was still sniffing. "Just clove," she said. "That's all."

Flavor is a cognitive figment. The brain fuses into a single experience the results of different stimuli registered by the tongue, nose, eyes, and ears, in addition to memories of previously consumed meals. For reasons that are not fully understood, we perceive flavor as occurring in our mouths, and that illusion is nearly unshakable, as is made clear by our difficulty identifying, with any reasonable specificity, the way each of our various senses contributes to the experience. In 2006, Jelly Belly, the candy manufacturer, produced a jellybean that mimicked the flavor of an ice-cream sandwich. When the company manufactured a prototype with a brown exterior and a white interior, people identified the flavor accurately during a trial, and said that it was a good representation of an ice-cream sandwich. Jelly Belly then made an all-white prototype; many trial respondents found it confusing, misidentifying its flavor as vanilla or marshmallow. As Hagen told me, "Color can play tricks on your mind, for sure."

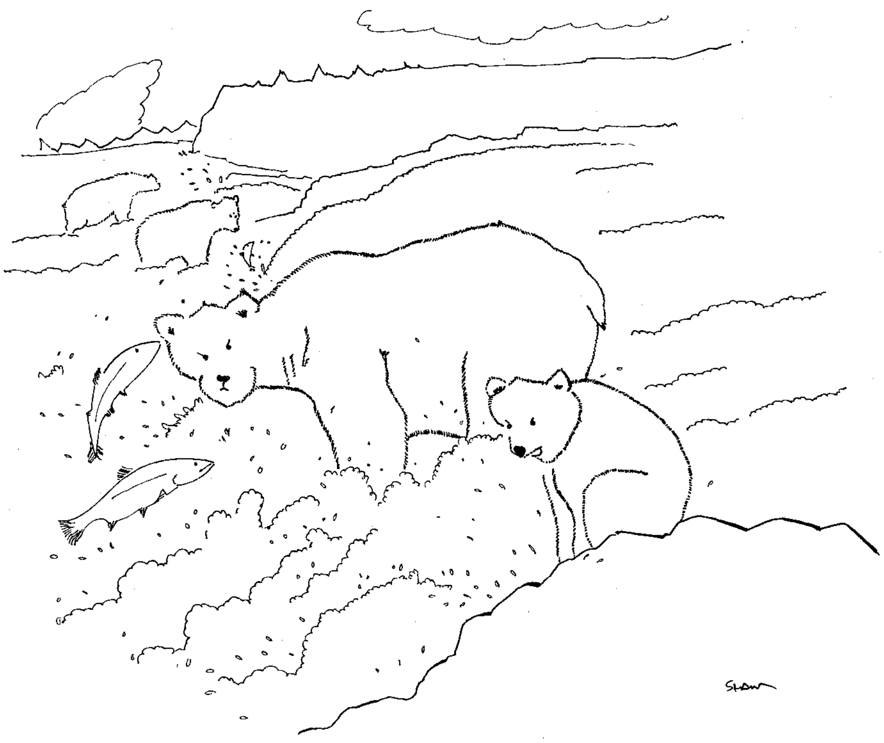
Hagen hoped to sample more than fifty of the collection's citrus specimens, but she was interested primarily in the aromas. Our sense of smell plays a much larger role in defining flavor than our sense of taste does. Taste receptors on the tongue are primarily limited to the detection of saltiness, sweetness, bitterness, sourness, and umami—a Japanese term for the brothiness that one encounters when tasting MSG. These receptors may also perceive fattiness, though this sensation is so poorly understood that it is hard to say for sure. Scientists have identified the function of fewer than thirty taste receptors, and still do not know which ones are responsible for the perception of saltiness and sourness. Jay Slack, one of Givaudan's chief research scientists, told me, "We are just beginning to scratch the surface of what happens when a molecule binds with the tongue, and then all of the biochemical events that happen after that to get a perception. If you imagine a domino trail, we've knocked off maybe four or five dominoes, and have a thousand more." Taste receptors are blunt instruments. With taste alone, one cannot distinguish a grape lollipop from a watermelon one; coffee is like hot water with a bitter aftertaste, and Coke a bland sugary solution. The limitations of taste are unsurprising when one considers its evolutionary purpose. Our biological progenitors, living in the wilderness, needed to know only what was worth eating and what wasn't. If something tasted sweet, there was a good chance that it provided energy; saltiness suggested the presence of minerals; sourness indicated the level of ripeness, and bitterness the presence of poison.

Smell is a more supple and primordial sense, and its centrality is evident in the way the human brain is arranged. Our forebrains evolved from tissues that once focussed on processing smells, and there are three hundred or so olfactory receptors in the nose. When we taste or see or hear something, the information must pass through the thalamus, a kind of relay station in the brain that allows us to attend to different aspects of perception. (If you suddenly notice a stop sign on the road, for instance, the thalamus has most likely directed your attention to it.) Smells, for the most part, are fed directly from the nose to a "presemantic" part of the brain where cognition does not occur, and where emotions are processed. The bypassing of the thalamus may be one reason why smells can be so hard to describe in detail, and also why aromas stimulate such powerful feelings. The smell of rotten meat can trigger sudden revulsion in a way that merely looking at it cannot.

Smell probably became wrapped up with eating because of its ability to predict. Each whiff is a harmless sample of a potentially risky food. To apprehend something by smell, it must be evaporating, even if only minutely. Chemical compounds that evaporate are said to be "volatile." Chocolate has many volatile compounds. So does lemon sorbet. A hot cup of coffee contains roughly five hundred volatile chemicals. When we eat, volatile chemicals in our food flow through a cavity at the back of the mouth into the nose. Some of them are extremely potent. The smell of roast lamb comes from minute quantities of sulfur compounds. Volatile chemicals can be mysterious. For many decades, we have known that a compound called vanillin plays a large role in determining our sense of vanilla, but the beany aroma that often makes high-quality vanilla seem full-flavored had long eluded science. People in the industry call the search for a complete mapping of a substance's volatile chemistry "chasing zero," and I met with a scientist working for Givaudan who had spent a great deal of time chasing this beaniness to zero. Doing so required multidimensional chromatography—a process for separating trace molecules out of a mixture—and expensive equipment. Last year, after evaluating hundreds of chemicals, he hit upon the three relevant molecules. "We found the beany contributors!" he told me. "We were very excited." The molecules were present at the level of parts per billion.

I asked Hagen how many chemicals she thought she could identify in a single bite of food. "I want to say twenty," she said. "If I am tasting a citrus fruit in the field, I could probably pick out ten chemicals for sure, and I could probably speculate about twenty-five more." Other flavorists said they could do about the same, and hearing them speak about the bouquet of Mountain Dew or Sprite—evaluating its arc, from top notes to bottom notes—you might think they were discussing a 1980 Montrachet. (Hagen told me that she thought Dr Pepper was "amazing," with a floral note that was unique and high. She spoke with awe of orange Gatorade: "I mean, that is *beautiful*.") During a meeting with several flavor professionals in New Jersey, I compared a flavor chemist's ability to break down the structure of a soft drink to the skills of Robert Parker, the wine critic. I was quickly corrected. "That's kind of like hocus-pocus," one of them said. "Parker may say that a wine has a nutty note or is oaky, but a lot of things can be behind that, and I don't think he's matching aspects of the flavor to a chemical compound and going, 'O.K., this note here, it comes from methyl isobutyrate.' " And yet controlled experiments show that, no matter what a person's professional vocabulary or expertise, aromas remain a blur: the average person, with minimal training, can perceive about three or four distinct components in a given aroma; professional flavorists—without leaning on their chemical knowledge of particular types of food—can do no better.

Even the most familiar products can bewilder us. Coca-Cola, for instance, is primarily a citrus beverage, its flavor derived from lemon, orange, and lime oils, combined with vanilla, cinnamon, other spices, and corn syrup. Its flavor has little in common with the astringent-tasting kola nut, from which it takes its name, and its caramel coloring is largely imposed. For many people, describing Coke's flavor as a combination of different parts is nearly impossible. (In one study, two-thirds of the subjects could not tell the difference between Classic Coke and Diet Coke.) If you close your

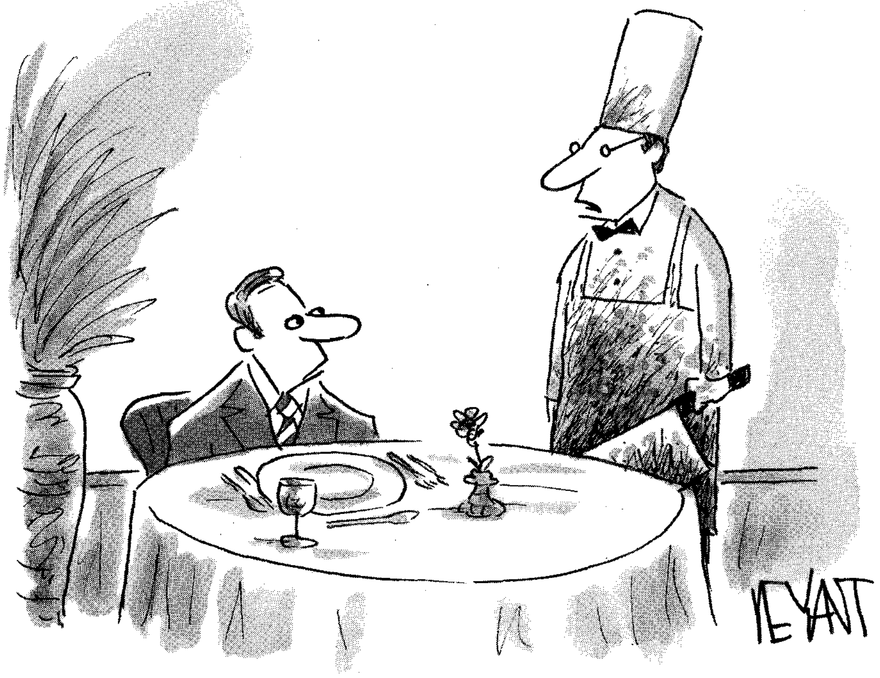


"I want a bagel!"

eyes, inhale deeply, and try to pay close attention to the volatile chemistry of Coke, it is possible to pick out a few basic elements, but for the average consumer the flavor is “cognitively impenetrable.” That is, if you ask someone “What does Coke taste like?” the answer will be tautological: “It tastes like Coke.” This presents a conundrum that many flavorists try not to think about. If consumers are cognitively unable to regard a flavor meaningfully, is there any point to what flavorists do? Hagen once told me, “My husband loves football, and so when I am watching the players on the sidelines drink Gatorade I’m thinking that they have no idea how complex that lemon-lime is. All they know is that it is quenching their thirst and it tastes good.” Still, she was hoping to discover the next big drink. Coke’s success is, in part, a testament to the sophistication of its formula, its exquisite balance, even if it does confound our senses.

By late morning, Hagen, Hassel, and the rest of the Givaudan team had begun eating salted crackers, trying to calm their palates after tasting so many citrons, oranges, and pomelos. The team had worked its way through half a dozen clementines. The Marisol clementine was a touch overripe, and its oil was oddly insectile. “It smells like crushed lightning bugs,” Hagen said approvingly, as she held a Marisol rind to her nose. “Kind of like formates. When you crush an ant, there is formic acid, so formates belong to a family of molecules that are, to me, all buggy.” The Nour clementine, from Morocco, was sweet. “There is something here that reminds me of bubble gum,” Hagen said. “Very kid-friendly. Isoamyl acetate, which is the chemical that reminds people of Circus Peanuts.” Hagen loved Hubba Bubba bubble gum as a child, and she thought that the Nour might have commercial potential. “It has a little bit of an edge,” she said. “A friendly edge.”

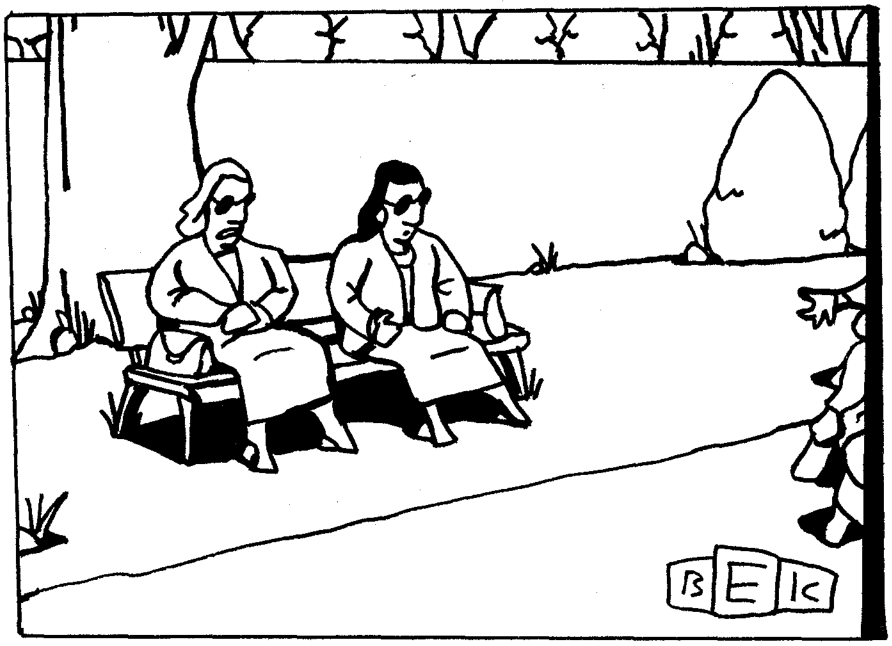
Exotic flavors rarely have immediate commercial appeal. Often, they must ease their way into the market, usually in combination with an old and well-loved companion. When, in the early nineties, Snapple paired kiwi with strawberry flavoring for its juice drink, the notion was considered highly innovative. Snapple had been working with the oldest American flavor house, Fritzsche Dodge & Olcott, which was acquired by Givaudan in 1991. Leonard Marsh, one of Snapple’s founders, told me that the flavorists made a variety of fruit flavors for him, including kiwi, which he initially rejected. “It didn’t taste good on its own,” he told me. “I said, ‘Can you mix this with something like strawberry?’ ” The result was wildly popular—and highly profitable for Givaudan. A former Givaudan executive told me, “We were selling Snapple fifty-five-gallon drums of kiwi-strawberry drink. At one point, we had purchased all the kiwi juice that was available globally.”



“Can I get you anything from the meat bar?”

Hagen told me that her favorite white-space flavor—the one she wished she had created—was Red Bull, because it succeeded in getting consumers to embrace the surreal. The co-founder of Red Bull, Dietrich Mateschitz, acknowledges that the company went out of its way to develop a flavor that was unorthodox. (“Some people say medicine never tastes good,” he told me. “You can translate this into our taste philosophy.”) Other flavorists were perplexed by Red Bull, which was created in 1987. “Have you ever tasted such a crazy flavor?” Hagen said. “What is it? There is nothing like it, and every once in a while you come across a flavor that is not especially balanced but for some reason it takes off.” Today, it is virtually impossible to market an energy drink that does not have the same unbalanced characteristics that Red Bull has. “It scores terribly when you put it in front of consumers who don’t think it is an energy drink,” a salesman for one of the top flavor houses told me. “But the spiky note in there now defines ‘energy.’ So when I build energy flavors with our client it has got to taste bad. If you give the consumer a great-tasting orange flavor for an energy drink, their liking drops way down, because it doesn’t have that ‘energy note’ they expect.”

Midway through the trek, it became evident that the fruits of greatest interest to the flavorists had off notes that, in combination with more palatable natural chemicals, added enough aromatic discordance to make the flavors unique. The Jamaican Ugli fruit, a large tangelo with rough greenish-yellowish skin, which has slowly been gaining a commercial following, had a sulfuric undertone that Hagen suspected was caused by prenyl mercaptan—which is often found in skunky beer. “With Corona, because it is in a clear bottle, when light hits it, it oxidizes, so that’s why you put a lime in Corona—to kill this mercaptan,” Hagen said. “It is this yucky bad note that people like. And you’re, like, O.K., whatever.” When I tasted the



"She's one of those bad mothers who say they're bad mothers but think they're good mothers."

• •

Ugli fruit, I didn't initially catch the prenyl mercaptan, but Hagen steered me. "Once you are past the floralness, the citrusness, then there is the sulfur note," she said—and there it was.

The team found that a rare specimen—the *Oxanthera neo-caledonica* hybrid—had even more divergent characteristics. The fruit's peel was smooth and yellow-green, and its oil had an aroma that was sugary, floral, and reminiscent of Juicy Fruit gum. After inhaling it, Hagen wrote in her notebook, "girlie-pink bubble gum notes, powdery fruit punch, sweet, tropical punch, very candy, reminds me of a Skittles or Starburst-type flavor, possible peach citrus notes, complex and unusual." But the fruit's taste was harshly bitter, even slightly fishy, and the juice caused a tingly, numbing sensation on the tongue—"a good example of how the peel is completely different from the taste," she told me. She found the specimen exciting.

Hassel agreed. Very few edible fruits have a numbing quality, and he thought that the tingling sensation could work in an alcoholic drink. "Even if you don't like the whole package, go in there and analyze what's giving it those unique notes," he said. Later, a Givaudan scientist tried to capture the headspace of a fruit that was still on the tree: he scraped a section of the peel, covered the exposed area with the bell jar, and activated a small pump that sent a stream of air over the fruit's surface, forcing molecules into the jar, where they collected in a filter.

Before the team moved on to the next grove, the flavorist from Amsterdam wondered if, in the laboratory, the numbing element could be extracted from the fruit's awful-tasting juice and then recombined with a flavor inspired by the peel oil. "You might add the numbing, but you wouldn't add the bitterness," he said. "Maybe just a hint. You would want something pleasant in the end."

Once you begin to consider the natural world at a molecular level, the boundaries that separate one fruit from another begin to seem like artifice. Givaudan's many scientists often refer to food as "the application," as if it were composed of malleable lines of computer code; from this perspective, adding a flavor is as simple as updating software. A garden strawberry turns out to be a very complicated application, made up of hundreds of differing molecules—some of them highly volatile, some of them inert to our senses—but among the ones that seem to matter most very few are exclusive to the strawberry. If you combine gamma-decalactone from a peach, ethyl butyrate from an apple, methyl cinnamate from a guava, and Furaneol from a pineapple, you can construct a very rudimentary strawberry flavor. As John Wright, a former vice-president for International Flavors & Fragrance, a New York-based company and a Givaudan rival, told me, "Flavors are a little bit like jigsaw puzzles." The interchangeability of nature made possible Givaudan's search for inspiration in Riverside. No matter how much the team liked the *Oxanthera neo-caledonica's* peel aroma, everyone on the trek knew that growing enough of the fruit to extract commercially significant quantities of its essential oil would be prohibitively expensive. An approximation of the oil would have to be constructed from more readily available materials.

In this respect, the *Oxanthera neo-caledonica* is just like the pomegranate or the açaí berry, both of which are expensive to harvest, or even the common lemon. Unusually cold weather in California and in Argentina, along with a hot Saharan wind pushing into the Mediterranean region, destroyed roughly thirty per cent of the world's lemon crop in 2008. So Givaudan, the world's largest purchaser of citrus oil, announced that it would create a "replacement" from the many lemon-oil molecules found in other botanicals and from whatever it could derive from natural sources in the lab. Citral, a dominant chemical in most lemon oils, is also found in lemon myrtle, a leafy plant native to a subtropical rain forest in Australia, and in *Litsea cubeba*, a small deciduous tree. In China, *Litsea cubeba*, known as mountain pepper, is used as a spice, but it also contains an oil that is made up largely of citral. Every year, the Chinese harvest hundreds of tons of the oil. For many years, *Litsea cubeba* and lemongrass have been the world's biggest natural sources of citral. If you drink or eat something with lemon flavoring today, one of its key ingredients probably does not come from a lemon.

A little before noon, the Givaudan team made an exciting discovery when David Karp—a writer and a part-time botanical explorer who is a research associate at the Citrus Variety Collection—ran over with a large pomelo and announced that he had something to share. "Most of the pomelos I really don't care for, at least as grown here in California," he said. "To me, they have a soapy flavor, in addition to the bitterness of the membrane. Even when you fillet them, I don't care for them, but Tahitian pomelos are very different. They tend to have a much thinner skin, and sort of a greenish flesh, and a very distinctive lemon-lime flavor." He cut into the fruit, carefully holding it away from his body. Juice sprayed all around him. "Never, ever open a pomelo near your computer or camera equipment," he said. "O.K., who wants to go first?"

"Me, me, me!" Hagen said.

Karp handed her a slice, which she held to her nose. He distributed more slices. "Usually, it is at its best when we are here in February," he said. On first impression, the Tahitian pomelo was unappealing: the rind oil gave off a bitterly unpleasant scent, and the fruit was densely seedy. But the taste and aroma of the juice was candylike, with hints of rice, peppercorn, and freshly cut grass, and it had a clean fruitiness: an uplifting wash of citrus. It had aspects of strawberry in it, and other aromatic layers hard to identify. If you closed your eyes and tasted it, it would be difficult to know what kind of fruit it was.

"Ah," Hagen said, throwing her head back. "That's wonderful."

Karp, passing around more slices, declared the fruit to be one of the most promising underexplored varieties of citrus on earth. He has occasionally sold exotic specimens to grocery stores, and told me that, a number of years ago, he had shipped a pallet of Tahitian pomelos to a wholesale affiliate of Gourmet Garage, in New York: "They said, 'What the hell are you sending us this horrible, green, seedy, nasty stuff for?' And I said, 'I'm sorry.' They said, 'We're going to put it in the Dumpster right now, you idiot.' They called me back the next day and said, 'How many more pallets can you get?' The chef tasted it, and he went wild."

Standing in the grove, the Givaudan team was going wild, too. People called out their first impressions. Except for someone who picked up "a shoe-polish note at the end," everyone was smitten. One of the flavorists declared that the Tahitian pomelo was "very different from anything I have tasted before." I turned to Hagen, and she grinned before announcing her verdict: "A good soda." It recalled, for her, the freshness of Sprite, but it had a childlike quality, too. "This is awesome," she told me. "Kind of like a lime—like the lime Life Savers, a little bit of lemon, a little bit of sweet pink grapefruit. Pink lemonade. It is really nice."

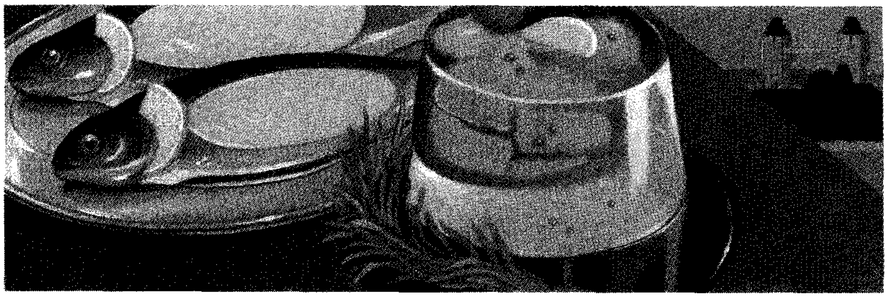
For much of human history, flavor additives were simple and direct. Spices and sauces added richness to food, and often preserved it. The pharaohs had a taste for cumin, as did the ancient Greeks, who kept it on the dinner table. But the diet of ancient Western civilization lacked many flavors that we now consider fundamental. For centuries, Rome's subjects did not know the lemon, which originated in Asia, and they never tasted a tomato, or chocolate or vanilla—derived from plants native to the New World. The ancients did not have coffee or tea. According to Andrew Dalby, the author of "Food in the Ancient World from A to Z," the Homeric epics offer the earliest record in Western civilization of a beverage infused with flavor: *kykeon*, a mixture of wine, herbs, and barley. ("One such drink is served to a soldier as a restorative after a hard day's work at the siege of Troy," Dalby says.) The Romans used grape syrup and spices in cooking, but perhaps the most popular additive was a fermented fish sauce called liquamen, or garum, distinguished by its saltiness. Liquamen was made throughout the Roman Empire; the earliest known manufacturer was a man from Pompeii. We know this from an advertisement that he had inscribed on his jars: "Best strained liquamen. From the factory of Umbricus Agathopus." For more than a millennium, flavor technology did not advance appreciably beyond the Agathopus workshop.

Essential oils have been used in fragrances for hundreds of years, and since at least the eighteenth century people have also consumed them. The first flavorists were typically pharmacists, who added flavors to medicines. As John Wright, the former International Flavors & Fragrance executive, has noted, their flavors were "often not very close to the character of the real food." Flavor creation did not take its present form until the development of organic chemistry, in the early nineteenth century, when scientists began to identify volatile chemical compounds with distinct aromas. In many instances, the discoveries were accidental. Benzaldehyde was among the first known molecules to be identified with a flavor, in 1832, and it is still widely used today. "It is my favorite chemical," Hagen told me. "Bitter almond was the source, and it is in there at a low level, but benzaldehyde really shines when it is in fruit flavors, where it can be used at a much higher level: cherry, grape, fruit punch—childhood bliss. My dad played softball, and we always would go to games and get a Cherry Icee. When I was first exposed to benzaldehyde in the industry, it reminded me of that. It's now one of my signature compounds."

At first, most flavors were natural. (Some of the earliest volatile chemicals to be identified were for strawberry, garlic, and roasted barley.) But during the ensuing decades chemists began to find ways to create these molecules entirely in the laboratory. Vanillin was synthesized in 1874 by two German scientists, Ferdinand Tiemann and Wilhelm Haarmann, from a molecule found in coniferous trees. Today, vanilla is the world's most popular flavor, and thousands of tons of vanillin are synthesized from industrial petrochemicals and waste from the production of wood pulp. (It is possible to extract it even from cow dung, as Japanese chemists demonstrated in 2006.) There is no molecular distinction between synthesized vanillin or vanillin extracted from vanilla beans, but the way the molecule is made determines whether it will be advertised as "natural" or "artificial." Flavor chemicals often make up less than one per cent of the ingredients in processed foods, and many flavorists regard the terms "natural" and "artificial" as largely meaningless—an indulgence for consumers who happen to believe that one is more likely to be toxic than another, even if the perception is not necessarily true. (After all, snake venom is natural.) The flavor industry has long resisted the public disclosure of its for-

IMPROVISATIONS BY JUDITH THURMAN

ASPIC



PIERRE MORNET

In the early nineteen-seventies, I lived in a London suburb south of the Thames, where, for five pounds a week, I rented the garret of a Victorian house. Marie-Annick Lancelot, a French girl studying for her doctorate in Chinese, lived in the flat below. Whenever I needed a proper stove (the garret was equipped with a hot plate), she let me use her kitchen. It became a laboratory filled, at dinnertime, with willing guinea pigs. But of all my aspirational concoctions none was more ambitious than the wedding breakfast that I volunteered to make for my housemate and her fiancé, Stuart Schram, Mao's biographer. (A French wedding breakfast is, traditionally, an elegant luncheon served after the couple awaken from their first night; this one followed a late-morning ceremony. As the reception, for thirty, would take place at the groom's house, the logistics dictated a cold buffet.)

Looking back, I'm not sure who was more reckless: I for offering such a gift, or Marie-Annick for accepting it. The Lancelots were a family of epicures, and Stuart was a formidable authority on French cuisine. But at twenty-one I had the perfect self-assurance of an ignoramus (a Marengo, I thought, was an exotic fruit served with veal). Gastronomy was one of the foreign languages that I blithely set out to master, and the breakfast was typical of my experiments; there wasn't a dish on the menu that I had ever even tasted. The two main courses I proposed were inspired by a passage in "Madame Bovary." Flaubert writes of the aristocrats who awe Emma at the château, "They had the complexion of wealth," a deceptive blush of youth fed on "a moderate diet of exquisite delicacies." O.K., I thought, let's go for lightness and grandeur—a fancy fish and a *poulet en gelée à l'estragon* (chicken in aspic), the ultimate feat of a culinary showoff.

The fish I settled on looked easy on paper, but you can never trust the breeziness of an Elizabeth David recipe. This one, from "French Provincial Cooking," was buried in an account of "Escoffier's Shooting Week-End Fifty Years Ago." It involved the poaching in wine of "some *ombres-chevaliers*," from the lakes of the Haute-Savoie, accompanied by a "completely original" cream sauce of grated horseradish and skinned walnuts. "Completely original" was the epithet that got me, but either David or her copy editor was a bit careless, because it's an *omble*, not an *ombre*, chevalier—"a humble knight." No fishmonger in London carried it, although at Harrods they suggested that no one would be the wiser if I substituted salmon trout. (They were wrong. An elderly British colonel who had, for all I knew, been a guest at that shoot remarked dryly, "It's rather closer to an *omble* than one would have thought.") While the trouts were cooling in their poaching liquid (a fine Crépy), I attacked the walnuts. I had parboiled them, but, even then, rubbing off their papery brown skin (the merest scrap will turn the sauce bitter) is a monstrous task that also rubs the skin off your fingers. My homemade crème fraîche was tinctured, ever so faintly, with blood.

By the time I started on the aspic, the hysteria of exhaustion had set in, so Marie-Annick suited up as my sous-chef. I had already sequentially simmered in the same pot three hard-to-come-by, free-range boiling fowls from Brest, with a pound or so of cracked veal knuckles. When the stock was strained, and had chilled overnight, I removed every speck of fat. Now I reheated it gently, whisking in a dozen egg whites, and rotating the pot a quarter turn every five minutes. As the whites rise to the surface, they draw out the impurities. You then strain the stock through cheesecloth, before flavoring it with the best port you can afford. To facilitate this operation, I had upturned a kitchen chair, and tied an old pillowcase (I couldn't find cheesecloth) to its legs. A large bowl fit snugly under it. It was past midnight on the wedding morning when, with trembling hands, I inverted the heavy cauldron over this contraption, which looked like a yurt. "I think it might be better to use a ladle," Marie-Annick suggested—too meekly and too late. As I lost my grip, two thirds of the precious elixir puddled at my feet. Hours later, what was left in the pot had set into a lovely golden jelly, enough to line a single mold. I arranged the chicken pieces on top, decorated them with blanched tarragon leaves, and varnished them with a reserved cupful of aspic that I had stirred over a bowl of ice until it turned syrupy. Dawn was breaking as I mopped the floor.

Marie-Annick e-mailed me recently from the farmhouse in Brittany where she and Stuart spend their holidays. "What do I remember of our breakfast?" she asked. "The bathtub filled with champagne bottles; the wife of the *Times*' Peking bureau chief in an apron, making last-minute canapés; and everyone getting just a tiny bite of your aspic, but thinking it deserved four stars." ♦

mulas, and so monitoring the safety of the chemicals in them is complex. After extended negotiations, the Food and Drug Administration and the industry agreed to maintain a list of compounds "generally recognized as safe," the use of which companies are not obligated to reveal.

In 1895, Xavier and Leon Givaudan, two brothers from Lyons, opened their company, in Zurich. They expanded to America in 1924. The fragrance-and-flavor industry was small, secretive, and rapidly changing. Most of the companies were clustered in lower Manhattan, near the dockyards on the East River, where drums of raw materials arrived from overseas. As the industry grew, it crept uptown. The factory owners were clubby: one of them conducted so much business at the Little Venice, a restaurant on Twelfth Street, that his Rolls-Royce became a fixture out front.

In the thirties and forties, many European flavor houses opened offices in New York, though not all of them brought their formulas. Jim Broderick, a retired flavorist, told me that he once interviewed for a job at the New York office of Firmenich, a European flavor-and-fragrance house: "When I asked them 'What's my job?' it was 'You take the flavors that we make over there and re-create them over here,' and I said, 'Well, can I see the formulas?' And they said no." At the time, flavor chemists kept formulas locked in a safe, or hid them in a drawer if someone walked into their office. "A company's soul is kept in formulas," Bill Downey, a former flavorist at Fritzsche, told me. (He created the flavoring for Snapple's original lemon iced tea one afternoon with a friend.) Flavorists can spend months trying to match a competitor's creation. When the Society of Flavor Chemists was founded, at the Little Venice in 1954, some members attended in secret because their companies did not want them there. One longtime flavor scientist called the industry "paranoid."

EXERCISE

Because the Greeks didn't bother much about plagiarism
Poems by Anacreon, born in Teos around 500 B.C.,

Appear among the Anacreontea,
Imitations made by poets who loved him.

In a dream I saw Anacreon, who called to me.
As he stumbled, drunk, he lifted a crown of flowers from his head.

Stephanus translated the poems into Latin in 1554.
In Taintignies, using a dictionary

Small enough to carry on active service,
Richard Aldington made the prose translation I adapt here.

I bound the garland around my forehead;
When I sang about Cadmus, my lyre spoke of love.

Today, flavor and fragrance houses bring in annual revenues of twenty billion dollars. About ninety per cent of the money that Americans spend in the supermarket goes toward processed food, much of which could not be made without companies like Givaudan. "Most of the food-and-beverage companies have become marketing-and-distribution companies," a flavor-company executive told me, only somewhat in jest. I understood what he meant when, in one of his laboratories, I saw a number of his colleagues working on a tasteless "slurry," consisting largely of starch, oil, and salt, which a client was hoping to transform into a marketable product. The client had asked the flavor company's in-house chef to develop various dips, such as guacamole, using fresh ingredients; after settling on the best recipes, the company's flavorists mimicked them chemically, with an eye toward injecting the flavor compounds into the slurry in the most stable and cost-effective way.

Given that flavor additives are generally safe, and make up a tiny percentage of any given product's ingredients, companies like Givaudan are in an unusual position when one considers how their work affects our health. A couple of older flavorists told me that the essence of their work is to bring greater enjoyment to life, which is not necessarily the same as providing food that is good for you. Eric Schlosser, in "Fast Food Nation," argues that the fast-food industry could not exist without the flavor industry: he points out that even McDonald's French fries are laced with natural flavoring to make them tastier.

In the case of junk food, flavor additives mask an absence, making cheap, nutritionally negligible ingredients seem delicious (or, at least, edible). But in many other cases, flavor additives mask a reduction in sugar or salt or trans fats—things that, in excess, are harmful. It may be too much to expect an American menu stripped of all processed food items, and such a world may not even be desirable. "Think about unflavored rice cakes," Hagen told me, when I raised the issue with her. "They would sit on the shelves, because they taste like ceiling tiles. Now, add a maple-syrup flavor or a cheddar-cheese flavor to those rice cakes. People would choose them as a snack. It's not practical or economical to use 'real' foods to add flavor. There are lots of problems with this: the availability, the stability, the over-all intensity of such things."

Taking unhealthy ingredients out of a well-loved brand—for instance, removing trans fats from Oreos—while trying to retain its flavor requires complex chemistry. Since the nineteen-seventies, flavor houses have been relying on gas chromatography and mass spec-

In my copy of "The Manner of Anacreon," Egoist Press, 1919,
Hamilton Collier of Scarsdale, New York, has written on the flyleaf

My first real understanding of the Greeks.
I regret I am unable to agree with them.

Hephaestus, carve me a hollow cup!
The dark earth drinks, and the trees drink the earth.

The sea drinks the wind,
The sun drinks the sea.

I was a child in the hills of Phrygia.
The swallow of Pandion was once a girl.

—*James Longenbach*

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trometry to decode the secrets of natural chemistry, and their expertise has deepened considerably. (In 1948, only nine components in orange-peel oil were known; since then, nearly two hundred more have been identified.) But, as the technology has changed, the notion of what a flavor company is has changed, too—from the simple mixing of ingredients that nature provides to a highly sophisticated sensory legerdemain. As a flavor-research scientist told me, "We are almost getting to pharmaceutical-grade science."

Givaudan emerged as the world's largest flavor company over the past few decades, following the acquisition of many competitors. In the past ten years, the flavor industry has undergone rapid consolidation. Nearly every flavorist I met had fallen into the profession by chance, and only after working as a journeyman apprentice in one of the smaller firms. Givaudan's head of flavor strategy, Bob Pellegrino, told me that several years ago, when he thought about his company's future, he noticed there was virtually no one new to hire: "It was like, Oh my God, we are going to have a bunch of flavorists in retirement in the next ten years, and then what?" He announced that any Givaudan technician or scientist could apply for a training program—three years of full-time study.

Hagen was among two dozen applicants. "By that point, I had fallen in love with what I was doing," she told me. She had been working as a lab technician, assembling formulas for a flavorist. "I had made a raspberry as a technician, and I was carrying it upstairs in an elevator in a little bottle, and I was just waiting in the elevator, and then I smelled it and I was like, God, how did that happen? It was this magical moment. I had brought all these chemicals together. The result smelled just like the raspberries that I used to pick with my grandmother." Hagen was one of only six applicants who made it through rigorous testing and interviews—she turned out to have an acute sense of smell. She completed the training in 2006, and joined the Society of Flavor Chemists the following year. Her first flavor to make it into a product was a blackberry.

By May, Hagen had developed several flavors based on the fruits that she had sampled in Riverside. I flew to Givaudan's headquarters in Cincinnati to follow her progress. The company's buildings occupy dual campuses on either side of Interstate 75—the factory on one side, and laboratories, kitchens, and offices on the other. When I pulled up to the building containing the laboratories, I was hit by an intoxicating odor, a blend of savory, earthy fragrances: cumin and cinnamon, perhaps, combined with a heavy sweetness. The intense aroma was somewhat chemical, but not immediately unpleasant (though locals occasionally complain). I walked past gardeners mowing the lawn. The fragrance of cut grass was absorbed by the building's ambient aroma, and as I entered I thought of something that Hagen had told me in Riverside. "The company has a murky brown smell," she had said. "It's like when you were a kid and you mixed all your paint up."

Most of the people I met at Givaudan went about their work with detached amusement. "We have a software specialist who has spent his whole career, thirty-five years, coming up with different coefficients for chemicals in chewing gum," Hagen told me. "He is able to predict when you experience certain chemicals throughout the chew." Later, during tours of the facilities—I had to promise not to reveal the names of any products—I met with researchers who had developed an experimental gum that changed flavors three times when chewed, and a "sequential release" cereal bar that went from blueberry to orange in my mouth. Much of their work was geared toward figuring out ways to maintain the tastiness of food that had been stripped of key ingredients. They experimented with molecules that make reduced-fat foods taste creamy and full-bodied, or that fool the mouth into thinking that low-sodium chicken soup tastes good.

For more than a century, Givaudan focussed on tinkering with volatile chemicals that register mainly in the nose. In the past decade, it has been investing heavily in taste research—a significant shift. After substantial sections of the human genome were decoded, in 2000, Givaudan hired a team of scientists to experiment with its application to food. Jay Slack, the research scientist, was one of them. He is now working with a chemical called hydroxy-alpha sanshool. "It is a 'tingle compound,'" he said. "If you ever put your tongue on a nine-volt battery—that buzz. So there is a chemical that evokes that sensation in your tongue. It is found in the Szechuan chili, and that is a unique sensation. It's not cooling, it's not burning, it's not warming. It is truly tingling, and so we are really interested to understand what is the receptor, or receptors, that give you that sensation in the oral cavity." Slack, along with several colleagues, is free to submit scientific papers—he recently published an article on how genetic differences shape the perception of sweetness around the world. His research on taste receptors (including some recently discovered in the intestine) has focussed on a question of tremendous commercial importance: how to dampen the experience of bitterness, a persistent side effect of many sugar alternatives. "Our goal is to develop flavor molecules that will tweak the sensitivity of the sweet system but not be sweeteners, because if they become sweeteners they are no longer flavors," he told me. "It's a regulatory line that's drawn in the sand."

Later, I was shown a building that was devoted to savory flavors, which tend to be complex, because of the vast number of chemicals involved and the time-sensitive nature of their aromas. (Fresh out of the kitchen, grilled fish or roasted beef may smell wonderful, but it can become unappealing an hour later.) In 2008, Givaudan conducted a yearlong study of chicken; using the device with the bell jar, researchers attempted to capture the headspace of dishes from around the world. A molecule-for-molecule re-creation of a recipe from China—roast duck with pickled radish—was stored in a little brown jar. A scientist dipped a paper blotter into it and handed it to me for a sniff. The smell was remarkably evocative.

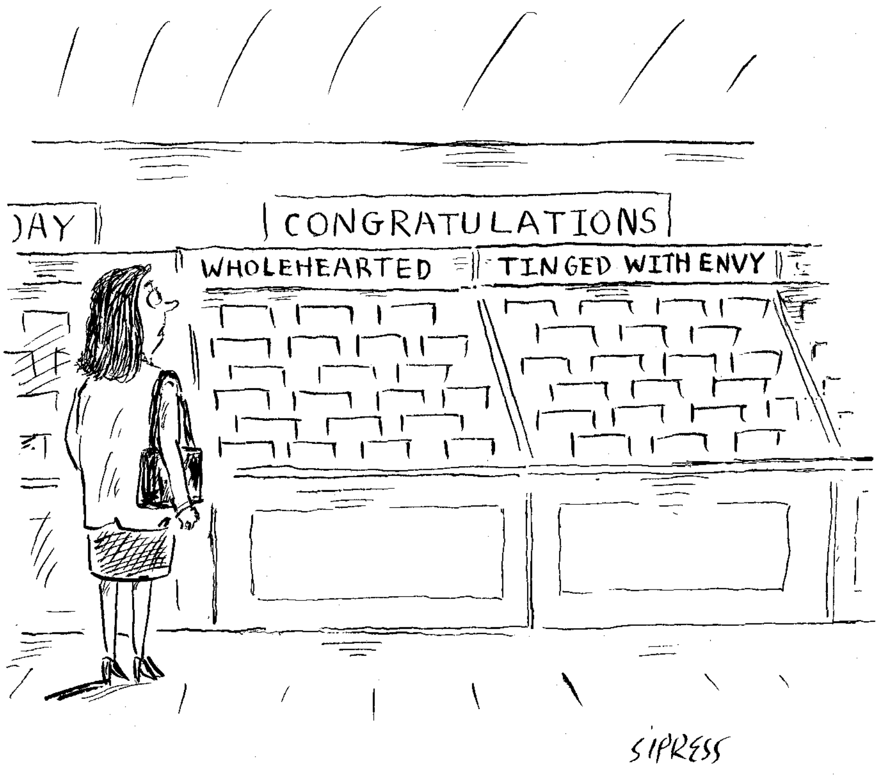
I visited a kitchen where celebrity chefs, among them Wylie Dufresne, of New York's wd-50, had worked on dishes that Givaudan's researchers then studied. For the chef Todd English, Givaudan had created a line of "melting powders"—chemical approximations of the sum flavor of his recipes, based upon a molecular breakdown of his entrées. The powders, which are sold on the Home Shopping Network, liquefy when they are sprinkled on cooked food, creating instant versions of English's recipes.

At one point, Hagen and I were walking through a hallway. "Hey," she called out to a flavorist hunched over a pristine lab bench, mixing chemicals in a beaker. "What are you up to?"

"Oh, making butter," the flavorist said.

Hagen's laboratory is on the second floor. Large windows overlook a metallic sculpture inspired by machinery that sprays flavor powders onto things like tortilla chips. Her shelves are lined with thousands of sepia-tinted bottles that could be artifacts from a nineteenth-century apothecary. The range of the bottles' contents is huge, and very few of the flavors are artificial. Hagen had an entire cabinet devoted to strawberry flavors, some of them combined with other fruit, some of them designed for specific applications, such as yogurt or hard candies. She directed me to some of her favorite molecules. One smelled "like fresh rain." Another smelled like carrots, and another like a mojito. She handed me a bottle and said, "Smells earthy, kind of like root, raw vegetable." Then she said, "Here is another flavor that I love. I made this and said, 'God, this smells like a Gummi worm!'" There were flavors that Hagen had created without ever sampling an original specimen. For a recent assignment, she had been given an analytical rundown of a jackfruit—a list of more than ninety of its volatile chemicals, identified by a gas chromatograph—and built a flavor solely on that information. Afterward, during a trip to San Francisco, she found a jackfruit in Chinatown, and tried it. Her version was slightly different, as she had expected it to be. "You are trying to sell a flavor," she said. "It's not like you are getting judged on how close you are to the real fruit. At the end of the day, you are getting judged on how good the flavor tastes. And you kind of have to take some artistic liberties."

In Riverside, Hagen had made initial sketches of the flavors from the citrus collection on a proprietary device that Givaudan calls the Mini Virtual Aroma Synthesizer, or the Mini-VAS. The machine—a complex network of valves and motors housed inside a shock-resistant stainless-steel suitcase—resembles the portable nuclear-missile launching systems that Dan Aykroyd and Chevy Chase lugged around in "Spies Like Us." When plugged into a laptop computer, the Mini-VAS can re-create just about any aroma. Each suitcase has room for twenty-nine removable plastic cylinders, called "keys," and each key contains a solid filter with an aroma embedded in it, such as spicy cinnamon or sweet orange or Citra-Fresh Lime. By forcing air through the keys at different intensities, flavorists can combine notes, like an organist playing a chord, until they get an aroma that closely matches the smell of a food that they want to simulate in the lab. The result is emitted through a small glass cone. Once the flavorist has "re-



corded" his subjective impressions of a fragrance, an algorithm produces an approximate molecular formula for the corresponding flavor. Increasingly, Givaudan has been inviting representatives from food and beverage manufacturers to use the machine so that they can more easily describe what they want the flavorists to do.

The company's citrus team had decided to develop a dozen flavors from the trek in Riverside, based mostly on limes and lemons (including the Meyer lemon) but also on more exotic items, such as the Tahitian pomelo and the Jamaican Ugli fruit, both of which had attracted the attention of one of America's largest beverage manufacturers. Hagen had taken several company executives to the Riverside groves, where they sampled the fruits and refined their impressions, using the Mini-VAS. The executives were enthusiastic and said that the company might rush the flavors to market in a series of drinks by the end of the year. But they wanted Hagen to make some adjustments first.

Hagen invited me to observe while she revised a flavor that she had based on the Mency tangor—a hybrid of a Mediterranean sweet orange and a Dancy mandarin. The Mency tangor was bred at the Riverside citrus collection in 1915 and exists in a limited supply. The collection's catalogue notes that it is an "early ripening fruit of sprightly, acid flavor," and during Hagen's return visit to the collection, in February, the tangor was overripe. Hagen had eliminated that aspect of it in her re-creation, but the beverage company had said that it wanted it back. Hagen found herself, as she put it, in "an interesting predicament." She had to add to the sample a note that was typically unappealing, but in a way that would improve the over-all flavor. "This is not something I initially know how to do," she said, and then began thinking aloud. "What happens when a fruit becomes overripe? It becomes sweeter and sweeter. The acid drops, so it becomes brown and sugary. I will have to add some brown notes."

She began at her desk, scrolling through a comprehensive spreadsheet that she had made during her training; it contained her descriptions of hundreds of chemicals. When fruits ripen, they not only become sweeter; they also become more sulfuric. Hagen began looking for sulfur compounds that she had previously associated with overripe aromas. There was dimethyl disulfide, which she called "garbacious." It can be found in garlic, leeks, and human feces. "That is not necessarily something I want to put into my citrus," she said. After considering a variety of chemicals, she settled on a few options: two sulfurous compounds—one found in grapefruit, another in black currant—and a molecule, common to many berries, that had "a sweet brown note and gives the impression of sugar." The latter was one of the most widely used Givaudan flavor compounds.

Because Hagen works with minute quantities of liquids—often with ingredients measured in parts per million—her instrumentation is highly precise. Using small clear plastic cups, an electronic scale, a beaker, a pipette, and a magnetic device that stirs chemicals evenly, she began trying out different recipes. With each attempt, she sampled the flavor in a solution of water, sugar, and citric acid. The first sulfuric compound made the drink taste dull; the second made the tangor flavor seem heavy and eggy; in the third, the brown note was hard to detect.

"I have one other idea—just hang with me," she said, and began to hunt through the many bottles. "There is a note that adds overripe to strawberries." She pulled down a bottle labelled "2-OCTEN-4-ONE"—a recently "discovered" compound in strawberry. Less than a decade ago, the molecule was considered artificial, but it was chased down in the natural world, and its status changed. It is now natural. "It is just the ripest note in the world to me," Hagen said, with growing excitement. Using the pipette, she carefully added a few drops to the existing flavor solution and, after diluting it with water, served it up. The change was pleasant, and, if anything, made her version of the tangor more conventional. Perhaps this was what the people at the beverage company had wanted all along. Hagen told me that she would make a few minor adjustments, but she felt that the job was done.

A few weeks later, I called her to see how the tangor revision had been received. She hadn't heard yet. There was always a period of uncertainty after she sent out a flavor, she told me. "I could sell a flavor as a strawberry, and at the end of the day it could be marketed as a mixed berry," she said. Sometimes, after a flavor leaves her lab, months, even years elapse before it is used in a product. Hagen told me that fewer than five per cent of her creations actually find their way to market. She didn't sound particularly dismayed. "It's in a bottle with a label," she said of her latest creation. "It is just waiting for an opportunity. I love it." ♦

"Chef, the salads are ready, the meat is seasoned, and you're washing your hands in the soup."

FICTION

INDIANAPOLIS (HIGHWAY 74)

BY SAM SHEPARD

I've been crisscrossing the country again, without much reason. Sometimes a place will just pop into my head and I'll take off. This time, down through Normal, Illinois, from high up in white Minnesota, dead of winter, icy roads, wind blowing sideways across the empty cornfields. Find myself stopping for the night outside Indianapolis, off 74, just before it makes its sweeping junction with 65 South to Louisville. I randomly pick a Holiday Inn, more for its familiar green logo and predictability than anything else. Plus, I'm wiped out. Evidently there's some kind of hot-rod convention going on in town, although I seem to remember those always taking place at the height of summer, when people can run around in convertible coupés with the tops down. Anyway, there are no rooms available, except possibly one, and that one is "Smoking," which I have nothing against. The desk clerk tells me she'll know in about ten minutes if there's going to be a cancellation. I'm welcome to wait, so I do, not wanting to face another ninety-some miles down to Kentucky through threatening weather.

I collapse into one of the overstuffed sofas in the lobby, facing two plasma-screen TVs in opposite corners, both tuned to the same "reality" channel, showing surveillance footage of convenience-store robberies: teen-agers in hooded sweatshirts, holding up their baggy jeans with one hand while the other pumps 9-mm. slugs into screaming victims, who claim they have no access to the safe. I ask the desk clerk if she can please turn the TVs off, or change the channel, but she says that she has no control over it. The TVs are on some kind of preordained computer system, much like sprinklers in Los Angeles or garage security lights everywhere else. I ask her if she can at least mute the sound, so that I don't have to listen to the agonized groans of the victims or the raging insanity of the gunmen, but she says that she has no control over that, either. I pick up a travel magazine featuring Caribbean vacations from the glass table and leaf through it, pausing at every picture of a bikini-clad woman lounging beachside holding a tall icy cocktail and staring smugly at the camera. The screams and groans and gunfire from the TVs keep repeating in looped cycles and soon lose all sense of being connected to murder. I find myself anticipating the next scream the way you would a familiar lyric in a pop song. (Here comes the high, shrieking temper-tantrum sequence just after he pops off a rapid spray of shots.) I'm not sure how long I hang there in limbo in the lobby, but it feels like far more than ten minutes.

A tall, skinny woman in a cloth Pat Nixon-type coat and a blue bandanna comes through the revolving doors, pulling a small suitcase on wheels. She smiles at me as she passes, and I feel immediately sad for no reason that I can put my finger on. She pauses at the desk to get her key, then continues toward the elevators, giving me a quick glance over her shoulder as she disappears down the hallway. Again, I feel this little stab of melancholy, or emptiness—maybe that's it. I stand and stretch, then walk over to the desk and ask the girl if she knows anything more about the cancellation. Not yet, she says, but reassures me that the possible guests will be calling any second now. They're coming in from Tupelo, Mississippi, with a trailerload of hot rods, and everything depends on the weather, she says. I return to the squashy sofa and collapse again. (Isn't Tupelo where Elvis was born?) I notice the yellow spine of a *National Geographic* at the bottom of a stack on the glass table and dig it out. The feature story is titled "The Black Pharaohs—Conquerors of Ancient Egypt." A man who looks very much like the young James Earl Jones is on the cover, his muscular arms crossed over his chest, with a leopard-skin cape, thick gold necklaces, and a gold-leaf skullcap with two shining cobras on the crown, staring stoically out. I am flipping through the glossy pages when I feel a tall presence beside me and hear a high-pitched female voice saying my name with a question mark behind it: "Stuart?" I turn to see the same skinny woman in her cloth coat but without the suitcase.

"You don't remember me, do you?" she asks. I stare into her green eyes, searching for something to recognize, but the same tinge of melancholy is all I get. "Nineteen-sixty-five," she says with a little sigh. "Tenth Street and Second Avenue? St. Mark's Church."

"I'm drawing a blank," I confess. "I've been driving for days. What seems like days, anyway."

She laughs nervously, half-embarrassed, then stares at the carpet. "We lived together for a while. Don't you remember? We'd get up every morning and sit on the edge of my mattress eating bowls of wheat germ with brown honey all over it."

"Oh," I say, and keep staring into her eyes with mounting desperation, wondering if maybe I've snapped some fragile synapse in my brain from too much driving; the final breakdown of road madness, right here in Indianapolis. Then she does an amazing thing. She whips off the blue bandanna and shakes out a mane of red hair that topples almost to her waist. Now it all comes back. "Oh—it's you," I say, still unable to attach a name.

"Who?" She giggles. "You don't remember me at all, do you?"

"Of course I do."

"You're just saying that."

"No—"

"Then what's my name? Come on, it wasn't that long ago."

"Nineteen-sixty-five," I say.

"Or six—"

"No, it couldn't have been."

"Maybe '68. That was it."

"That's still forty years ago!"

"No!" She laughs.

"Add it up."

"Yeah, I guess it was, wasn't it?"

"Beth, right?" I blurt out.

"No. See? You don't remember."

"Betty?"

"Close."

"What, then? This is wearing me out."

"Becky!" she announces with a beaming smile and her arms wide open, as if I were about to jump up and embrace her.

"Sure—Becky. That's right. Becky. Of course."

"What's my last name?"

"Oh, please—I can't keep up with this. I'm really wiped out—"

"Thane," she says.

"Thane?"

"Thane. Becky Marie Thane."

"Right," I say.

"You really don't have any recollection at all, do you?" she says in almost a whisper, then stifles a little chuckle. She crosses her long arms and holds her shoulders softly, as though filling the blank of affection she wishes were coming from me. "I was so in love with you, Stuart," she says, sighing, and her eyes drift down to the pink wall-to-wall carpeting with pizza stains and Pepsi splashes. The violent sounds of the surveillance loop keep mercilessly repeating. I notice the girl behind the desk giving us a sideways glance, then

DENIS DARZACQ/AGENCE VU/AURORA

returning to the bright-green glow of her computer screen. There is no escape. Becky Marie Thane lets her long arms fall to her sides in surrender, the blue bandanna dangling from her right hand. I return the *National Geographic* to the glass table and then I do suddenly get a picture of that time, a fleeting memory of a morning facing a New York window with a bowl clenched between my naked knees, and I say, just to be saying something, "Your hair is even redder than I remember," which makes her burst out laughing, happy that I haven't abandoned the game.

"It's not real," she says.

"What?" I say, thinking she's referring to something metaphysical.

"The color. Clairol. Out of a bottle."

"Oh—well, it looks great."

"Thanks."

"Very . . . festive."

"Festive?" She giggles and fluffs the back of her head like a movie star. Then she gets embarrassed again and twists herself from side to side.

"So, how old were we then?" I stumble on without really wanting to.

"We were kids," she says. "We were barely in our twenties."

"Were we?"

"*I* was, anyway. I know that much."

"Kids—yeah, I guess."

"How many do you have?" she asks. Her green eyes meet mine, and the little twinge of sadness I was feeling turns into an undertow.

"You mean children?" She nods and her eyes stay hooked to me.

"I've got a whole bunch," I say.

"How many?" she insists.

"Five. But not all with the same woman."

"That doesn't surprise me." She smiles.

"How about you?" I ask.

"Two. I have two girls."

"Two. That's great. Where are they?" I say.

"Here. Well, I mean—"

"That's right. You're from Indianapolis, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. You remember that!" She smiles.

"I remember your dad calling, back then. When we were sitting on the bed eating that stuff."

"Wheat germ."

"Right. He called to tell you there was a riot going on in your front yard. So it *must* have been '68, wasn't it? That was when there was a riot every other day."

"Must've been."

"Martin Luther King and—"

"Right."

"Everything exploding. Detroit. L.A."

"The whole world on fire."

"Seemed like."

"Well." She pauses, fishing for something more. "I didn't mean to—I mean, I was so shocked when I walked through the door and saw you sitting here. I couldn't believe it. I knew it was you as soon as I saw you, but . . . I thought, I can't just walk on by and not say anything. You know—just go on up to my room and pretend it wasn't you. I had to come back down and say something. I mean—all this time."

"No, I'm glad you did. It's great to see you."

"What in the world are you doing here? In Indianapolis."

"Just passing through."

"Oh."

"How about you? I mean, if you live here how come you're in a Holiday Inn?"

Everything stops. She goes suddenly numb and her lips start to tremble. For some reason, the background seems to have gone silent. The girl at the desk stares at us now, as though she suspects that something illegal is going on.

"My husband—" Becky says, and halts on the words. "My husband disappeared a month and a half ago. He—just took off."

"Oh, no," I say.

"He took the girls."

"No—"

"He may have left the country." I find myself standing and making a feeble gesture toward comforting her, but I'd rather be running out the door.

"Have you—I mean, do you have help?" My mouth has gone dry. "Police? Lawyers?"

"Yes, I've gone through all that."

"That's a pretty serious—I mean, that's considered kidnapping, isn't it?"

"It *is* kidnapping."

"Have you got any clues? I mean—"

"We've followed some credit-card debits—you know, gas stations, restaurants—but they all led to dead ends. Everything winds up in Florida and just stops."

"Florida?"

"He has some family down there."

"What about the girls? How old are they?"

"Fifteen and seventeen. There's still some investigation going on at the house, so that's why I can't stay there."

"Oh."

"I just took a room here for the time being. I'm kind of in limbo, I guess." She casts an arm out limply, and the blue bandanna flutters up like a distant flag of truce. Her eyes scan the two plasma screens as the screaming and the gunfire start up again. "I'm sorry," she says. "I didn't mean to lay all this on you. I just saw you sitting here when I came in and thought—"

"No, that's O.K. I'm glad you—it's just great to see you again."

She laughs, then breaks down, but quickly recovers herself and turns her shoulder to me. I move to console her, but she turns her back completely and crosses her arms again. The desk clerk is heading straight for me across the lobby, with her laminated nametag pinned to her chest and an apologetic face. "I'm sorry, sir," she says, "but they've just confirmed that room I was telling you about. That 'Smoking' room with two beds."

"Oh," I say.

"Yeah, they just phoned in to confirm it. They're on their way. I'm sorry about that."

"That's O.K."

"There's a Motel 6 just off 465. They usually might have a vacancy. If you want, I can call down there, see if they've got something."

"Would you mind doing that? I'd appreciate it very much."

"No problem. I'll let you know." She heads back to her post. Becky seems to have pulled herself together now. Her arms drop, and she starts brushing off the front of her coat as though she'd just discovered lint. She turns to me with a smile and rubs her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Well, I'm so glad I ran into you, Stuart. You look the same as always." She steps toward me with her hand extended, which I find slightly ineffectual, under the circumstances, but I go along with it. Her hand feels icy and slim, and she slides it back out of my grip almost immediately. Then she gives me a little peck on the cheek, like a sister might. It all comes back to me now, the smell of her soft breath. "Bye," she says abruptly, and walks away, disappearing down the hallway again.

If I had a gun right now, I'd shoot both the plasma TV screens and maybe the overstuffed sofa, and then maybe I'd start in on the glass coffee table and the Caribbean-vacation brochure and all the *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines with men of the year on their covers. Instead, I wander back over to the desk, where the girl with the laminated name is being surprisingly helpful. I get close enough to read the tag as she squishes the phone between her chin and her collarbone while scratching down a note. "Lashandra," the tag says, and it has a little yellow happy face to go with it. "Lashandra," I say to her, not knowing exactly which syllable to emphasize. She squints at me and holds a blue-lacquered fingernail to her lips, as though she were about to land a luxury suite down at the Motel 6. I signal to her that I no longer want the room by drawing my index finger across my throat, then head for the revolving doors. Lashandra calls out to me in dismay, "Sir! Excuse me, sir!" I turn back to her. "Don't you want the room? I think I might have found you something."

"No, thanks, but I do appreciate your efforts. You're very kind."

"Oh, no problem at all, sir. Sorry it didn't work out."

"Lashandra, could I ask you a quick question?"

"Sure, sir. Anything at all."

"Don't you ever go crazy listening to that TV all night long? That—murder?"

"Oh, I don't even hear it anymore. You know—it's just always on." She smiles, and I pass through the revolving doors. The pistol shots fade behind the glass.

Outside, it's dark, snowflakes floating through orange light. I completely forgot that I left the car running, and my yellow dog is clawing frantically at the windows, seeing me approach. I let her out the back. She slides across a patch of ice as she hits the asphalt. Her tail is wagging wildly in circles, as though she'd picked up the scent of quail. She dashes off toward a little square of brown grass to take a leak. The temperature feels like it's dropped down into the low twenties now, and the flying snow makes my eyes tear up. The dog must be taking the longest piss on earth. She just squats there with one hind leg weirdly raised, staring straight at me, as though I might run off without her. Steam rises behind her. The hollow moan of the highway makes me wonder if I've finally broken all connections, without even really wanting to.

I pop my dog back in the car and slide into the driver's seat, which is now red hot, since I also left the seat warmer on. I'm about to drop the gearshift down into drive when I look up through the snow and there she is—Becky Marie Thane—standing directly between the headlights, staring at me with a look not unlike my dog's. She's

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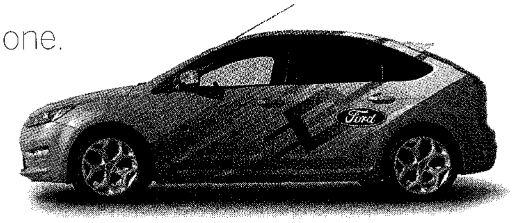

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"O.K., her mouth is full—run over and ask her if everything is O.K."

• •

standing there shivering, without her coat, and the snow catches hold of her red hair and it glows in the backlight, like a halo. Am I now having a religious experience?

She comes running up to the window as I roll it down, amazed. "I'm sorry," she says. "I just thought maybe you'd want to stay in my room since you can't—I mean, I have a couch and everything. A separate couch. It's a fold-out, you know—in an alcove with a sink. Not a whole room, exactly, but I just thought it would save you a trip in this weather. I'm not trying to—you know—"

"Oh, thanks, Becky," I say, cutting her off. "I really appreciate it, but I ought to be getting on down the road."

"All right, that's fine. That's fine." She smiles. "I just thought I'd offer. I wasn't trying to—"

"No, thanks so much, though. It was really great to see you again."

"Bye," she says sweetly, and gives me a little fluttering wave, then blows me a kiss as I drive off. I watch in the rearview mirror as she darts back into the lobby, stomping the snow off her shoes at the entrance. I'm trying to think of what old movie this reminds me of. One of those corny black-and-white forties Air Force films with tearful goodbyes as Jimmy Stewart flies off into the wild blue yonder. Why is everything I'm conjuring up in black-and-white?

The snow is really assaulting the windshield as I head for the Louisville junction, the dog turning tight circles in the back, then dropping down into a ball and tucking her nose into her tail, resigning herself to yet another hundred miles of bleak highway. I start drifting off into the past as the world gets dimmer and whiter. Maybe there's a correlation between external blindness and internal picturing. I can see the edge of the mattress now, and our gray bowls side by side, our knees touching. These are some of the other things that go sailing through my head as I strain to keep the car between the lines: Leaving the desert on a clear day. Boarding the Greyhound. Getting off in Times Square. Huge poster of a pop group from England with Three Stooges haircuts. Blood bank with a sign in the window offering five dollars a pint. Black whores with red hair. Chet Baker standing in a doorway on Avenue C. Tompkins Square Park, with its giant dripping American elms. Cabbage-and-barley soup. Hearing Polish for the first time. Old World women in bandannas and overcoats. Cubans playing chess. Rumors of acid and TCP. Crowds gathered around a black limo, listening to a radio report of Kennedy's killing. Jungles burning with napalm. Caskets covered in American flags. Mules hauling Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s coffin. Stanley Turrentine carrying his axe in a paper sack.

I'm turning around. I'm in the middle of a blizzard and I'm turning around. I come up on a giant tractor-trailer rig, jackknifed in the ditch. No sign of a driver. I'm up over the median now, with the hazard lights flashing, hoping that nothing is roaring down on top of me from the opposite lanes. I'm driving blind. I'd get over to the shoulder, but I can't tell where it is. Something is happening to my eyesight in the constant oncoming flow and swirl of snow. I feel as if I'm suddenly falling through space and the wheels have somehow lost all contact with the earth. I really am coming completely apart now, shaking, terrible shivers, gripping the wheel as if any second I could just go plunging off into the abyss and never be found.

Somehow I instinctively poke my way back through the gray to the looping exit, and limp into the Holiday Inn parking lot. The family from Tupelo are unloading their huge crew-cab diesel in the whirling storm, sliding their coolers and luggage across the icy blacktop. I just sit there for a while, watching them through the wipers, my hazard lights still flashing, and my dog getting very nervous about what may lie ahead. Maybe I'll just spend the night in the car, I think. Wait it out. That would mean leaving the engine running so that I wouldn't freeze to death. That would mean that the dog would be whining and turning in circles. I snap on my satellite radio for some possible clue. The angelic voice of Sam Cooke. I can't take it. I turn it off, not wanting to provoke a total emotional breakdown. Can I just sit here all night like this? Engine running. Dog spinning. Lights blinking. Snow falling. What will happen when the sun finally comes out and the snow stops and the ice melts and the whole landscape is transformed into spring and stuff is blooming and farmers are running their gigantic combines up and down the long rows? What will happen then? Will I still be sitting here like this with the car running? What will happen when they discover that someone is trying to live in his car in the Holiday Inn parking lot? I've got to get this car parked!

So I do, and then one thing leads to another and I'm heading back into the lobby, not really looking forward to encountering Lashandra again, not really looking forward to waiting in line behind the Tupelo hot-rod family, but there I am. Thank God the TV channel has changed. Now it's news with some distinguished-looking dude in a suit, parading back and forth in front of a huge electronic map of the United States, magically touching it and brushing it in different areas, causing it to light up red in the South, blue in the North, giving the impression that the whole damn country is a cartoon show, divided up like apple pie, and no one actually lives here, trying to score a simple room at the Holiday Inn in the middle of a blizzard, somewhere on the outskirts of Indianapolis.

The Tupelo family finally trundle off with all their gear toward the "Smoking" room I once coveted. Lashandra's face is unsure what expression to make when she sees me pathetically standing there again. It's a cross between smiling politeness and sheer terror at what she must see in my eyes. "Lashandra, hi," I say meekly. She says nothing. "I was wondering if you could do me a favor. I—the storm is really bad out there. You wouldn't believe it."

"That's what they were saying," she says. "Those folks from Tupelo."

"It's unbelievable. Whiteout. I could barely see the hood in front of me."

"They've got it on the news," she says. "All the way down into New Orleans, I guess."

"Really? Well—I couldn't—I had to turn back around."

"I still haven't got any vacancy, though," she says.

"No, I know. I know that. But what I was wondering is—I have an old friend here. That woman—you know, that woman I was talking to before? That tall skinny woman with the red hair?"

"Right," she says.

"I was wondering if you could give me her room number, because she offered to let me stay in her room and—"

"We're not allowed to give out the names of guests, sir."

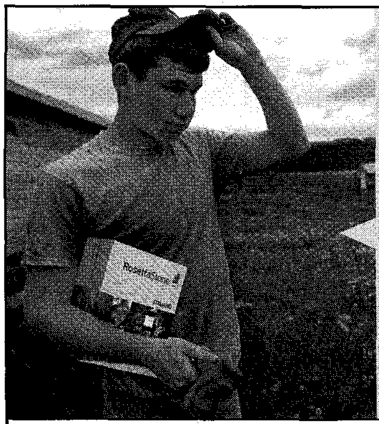
"No, I know. I mean—I know her name. Her name is Becky Marie Thane and we used to live together in New York City. Way back, I mean."

"Well, I still can't just give out the room number, sir. That's our policy."

"I understand that, but do you think I could call her, then, on the house phone? Would that be all right?"

"Sure. I can let you do that. Let me get you connected." She slides the house phone toward her, looks up Becky's room number, punches it in, then hands me the receiver. I'm holding it to my ear, hoping that Lashandra will stop staring at me and turn her back discreetly, but she stays right there, eyes boring into mine. Becky picks up.

"Hello," she says, and the simple innocence of her voice starts me weeping and I can't stop, and Lashandra finally turns away. ♦



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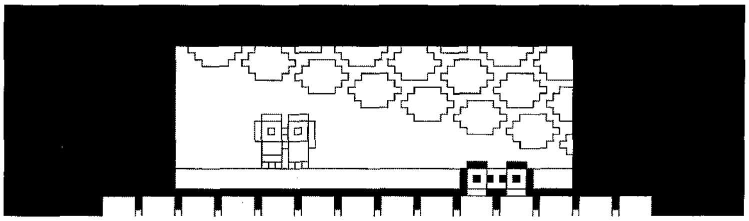


A CRITIC AT LARGE

WHAT’S THE RECIPE?

Our hunger for cookbooks.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

A man and a woman lie in bed at night in the short hour between kid sleep and parent sleep, turning down page corners as they read. She is leafing through a fashion magazine, he through a cookbook. Why they read these things mystifies even the readers. The closet and the cupboard are both about as full as they’re going to get, and though we can credit the fashion reader with at least wanting to know what is in fashion when she sees it, what can the recipe reader possibly be reading for? The shelf of cookbooks long ago overflowed, so that the sad relations and failed hopes (“Monet’s Table,” “A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain’s Secret Jews”) now are stacked horizontally, high up. The things he knows how to make that are actually in demand are as fixed as any cocktail pianist’s set list, and for a clientele of children every bit as conservative as the barflies around that piano: make Parmesan-crusted chicken—the “Feelings” of food—every night and they would be delighted. Yet the new cookbooks show up in bed, and the corners still go down.

Vicarious pleasure? More like deferred frustration. Anyone who cooks knows that it is in following recipes that one first learns the anticlimax of the actual, the perpetual disappointment of the thing achieved. I learned it as I learned to bake. When I was in my early teens, the sick yearning for sweets that adolescents suffer drove me, in afternoons taken off from school, to bake, which, miraculously, meant just doing what the books said and hoping to get what they promised to yield. I followed the recipes as closely as I could: dense Boston cream pie, Rigó Jansci slices, *Sacher Torte* with apricot jam between the layers. The potential miracle of the cookbook was immediately apparent: you start with a feeling of greed, find a list of rules, assemble a bunch of ingredients, and then you have something to be greedy about. You begin with the ache and end with the object, where in most of the life of appetites—courtship, marriage—you start with the object and end with the ache.

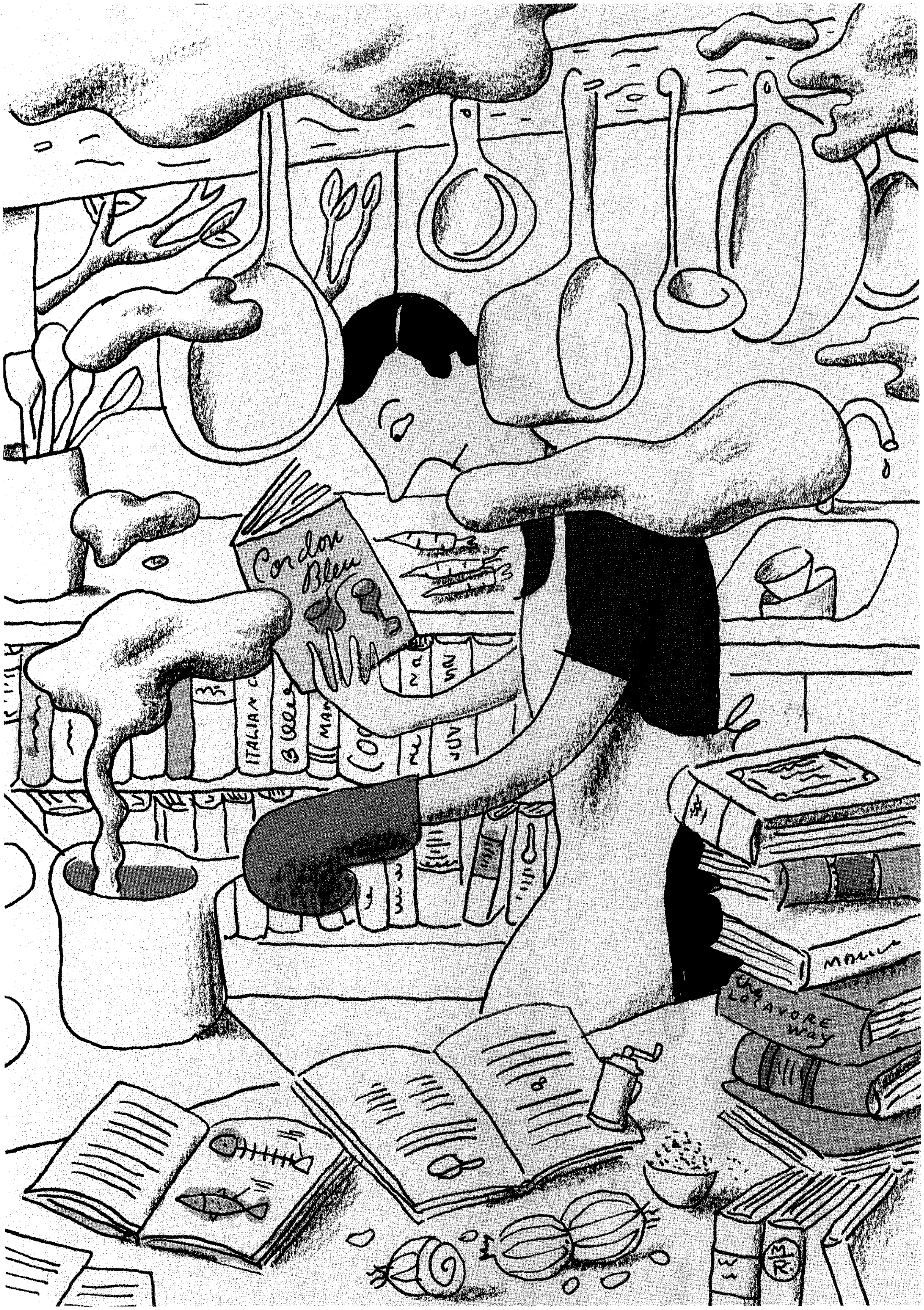
Yet, if the first thing a cadet cook learns is that words can become tastes, the second is that a space exists between what the rules promise and what the cook gets. It is partly that the steps between—the melted chocolate’s gleam, the chastened, improved look of the egg yolks mixed with sugar—are often more satisfying than the finished cake. But the trouble also lies in the same good words that got you going. How do you know when a thing “just begins to boil”? How can you be sure that the milk has scorched but not burned? Or touch something too hot to touch, or tell firm peaks from stiff peaks? How do you define “chopped”? At the same time as I was illicitly baking in the afternoons, I was learning non-recipe main-course cooking at night from my mother, a scientist by day, who had long been off-book, as they say in the theatre, and she would show, not tell: how you softened the onions, made them golden, browned them. This practice got you deeper than the words ever could.

Handed-down wisdom and worked-up information remain the double piers of a cook’s life. The recipe book always contains two things: news of how something is made, and assurance that there’s a way to make it, with the implicit belief that if I know how it is done I can show you how to do it. The premise of the recipe book is that these two things are naturally balanced; the secret of the recipe book is that they’re not. The space between learning the facts about how something is done and learning how to do it always turns out to be large, at times immense. What kids make depends on what moms know: skills, implicit knowledge, inherited craft, buried assumptions, finger know-how that no recipe can sum up. The recipe is a blueprint but also a red herring, a way to do something and a false summing up of a living process that can be handed on only by experience, a knack posing as a knowledge. We say “What’s the recipe?” when we mean “How do you do it?” And though we want the answer to be “Like this!” the honest answer is “Be me!” “What’s the recipe?” you ask the weary pro chef, and he gives you a weary-pro-chef look, since the recipe is the totality of the activity, the real work. The recipe is to spend your life cooking.

Yet the cookbooks keep coming, and we continue to turn down their pages: “The Asian Grandmothers Cookbook,” “The Adaptable Feast,” the ones with disingenuously plain names—“How to Roast a Lamb: New Greek Classic Cooking” (a good one, in fact)—and the ones with elaborately nostalgic premises, like “Dining on the B. & O.: Recipes and Sidelights from a Bygone Age.” Once-familiar things depart from their pages silently, like Minerva’s owls. “Yield,” for instance, a word that appeared at the top of every recipe in every cookbook that my mother owned—“Yield: six portions,” or twelve, or twenty—is gone. Maybe it seemed too cold, too technical. In any case, the recipe no longer yields; it merely serves. “Makes six servings” or “Serves four to six as part of an appetizer” is all you get.

Other good things go. Clarified

ABOVE: TIBOR KÁRPÁTI; OPPOSITE: MARC ROSENTHAL


Cordon Bleu
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Can you really learn to cook from a book? How do you tell firm peaks from stiff ones? How do you define "chopped"?

"It's your ribs. I'm afraid they're delicious."

• •

butter (melted butter with the milk solids skimmed and strained) has vanished—Graham Kerr, the Galloping Gourmet, once used it like holy water—while emulsified butter (melted butter with a little water whisked in), thanks to Thomas Keller's sponsorship, plays an ever-larger role. The cult of the cooking vessel—the wok, the tagine, the Dutch oven, the smoker, the hibachi, the Tibetan kiln or the Inuit ice oven or whatever—seems to be over. Paula Wolfert has a new book devoted to clay-pot cooking, but it feels too ambitious in advance; we have tried too many other modish pots, and know that, like Elvis's and Michael Jackson's chimps, after their hour is done they will live out their years forgotten and alone, on the floor of the closet, alongside the fondue forks and the spice grinder and the George Foreman grill. Even the imagery of cooking has changed. Sometime in the past decade or so, the actual eating line was breached. Now the cooking magazines and the cookbooks are filled with half-devoured dishes and cut-open vegetables. Michael Psilakis's fine Greek cookbook devotes an entire page to a downbeat still-life of torn-off artichoke leaves lying in a pile; the point is not to entice the eater but to ennoble the effort.

With their torn leaves and unyielding pages, cookbooks have two overt passions right now: one is simplicity, the other is salt. The chef's cookbook from the fancy place has been superseded by the chef's cookbook from the fancy place without the fancy-place food. David Waltuck, of the ever to be mourned Chanterelle, started this trend with his "Staff Meals," and now we have Thomas Keller's "Ad Hoc at Home," and, from Mark Peel, of the Los Angeles hot spot Campanile, "New Classic Family Dinners." ("Every single recipe was tested in Peel's own home kitchen—where he has only one strainer, just like the rest of us, and no kitchen staff to clean up after him.") The simplicity is in part a reaction to the cult of complexity of Spain's Ferran Adrià school of molecular cooks, with their cucumber foam and powdered octopus. Reformations make counter-reformations as surely as right makes left; every time someone whitewashes a church in Germany, someone else paints angels on a ceiling in Rome. But simplicity remains the most complicated of all concepts. I have in one month stumbled over six simple recipes for making ragù or Bolognese—plain spaghetti sauce, as it used to be known, when there was only one kind—with chicken livers or without, diced chuck roast or hamburger, white wine or red. Yet all movements in cooking believe themselves to be movements toward greater simplicity. (Even the molecular gastronomes believe that they are truly elemental, breaking things down to the atomic level.) Curnonsky, the greatest of the interwar gourmands, was famous for preferring the cooking of the provinces and of grandmothers to the cuisine of restaurant chefs, and the result was such monuments of simplicity as Tournedos Curnonsky: filet of beef with grilled tomatoes, poached bone marrow, and cognac-port-and-black-truffle sauce.

Simplicity is the style, but salt the ornamental element—the idea of tasting flights of salt being a self-satirizing notion that Swift couldn't have come up with. The insistence on the many kinds of salt—not merely sea salt and table salt but hand-harvested fleur de sel, Himalayan red salt, and Hawaiian pink salt—is everywhere, and touching, because, honestly, it all tastes like salt. And now everyone brines. Brining, the habit of dunking meat in salty water for a bath of a day or so, seems to have first reappeared out of the koshering past, in *Cook's Illustrated*, sometime in the early nineties, as a way of dealing with the dry flesh of the modern turkey, and then spread like, well, ocean water in a tsunami, until now both Keller and Peel are happy to brine everything: pork roasts, chicken breasts, shrimp, duck.

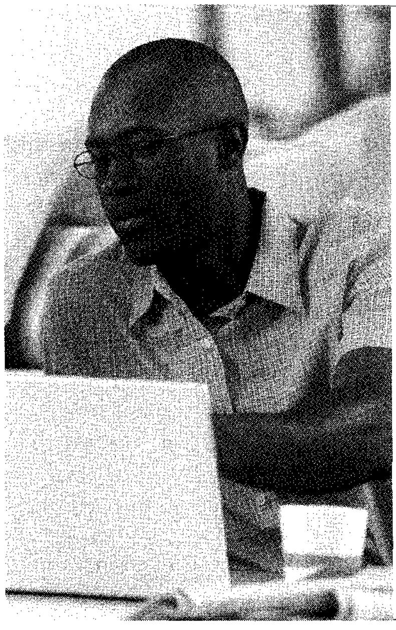
Although brining is defended with elaborate claims about tenderness, what it really does is make food taste salty, and all primates like the taste of salt. That's a feature, not a bug; we're doing what our peasant ancestors did, making meat into ham. Salted food demands a salty sweet, and we read that in Spain recently one connoisseur had "a chocolate ganache coated in bread floating in a small pool of olive oil with fleur de sel sprinkled on it," while we can now make pecan-and-salt caramel-cheesecake chocolate mousse with olive oil and flaky-salt sticky-peanut cookie bars for ourselves.

The salt fetish has, I think, another and a deeper cause: we want to bond with the pro cooks. Most of what pro cooks have that home cooks don't is what plantation owners used to have: high heat and lots of willing slaves. (The slaves seem happy, anyway, until they escape and write that testimonial, or start that cooking blog.) But the pro cooks also *salt* a lot more than feels right to an amateur home cook; both the late Bernard Loiseau and the Boston cook Barbara Lynch have confessed that hyper-seasoning, and, in particular, high salting, is a big part of what makes pro cooks' food taste like pro cooks' food. But the poor home cook, without hope of an eight-hundred-degree brick oven, and lucky if he can press-gang a ten-year-old into peeling carrots, can still salt hard, and so salt, its varieties and use, becomes a luxury replacement, a sign of seriousness even when you don't have the real tools of seriousness at hand.

The urge to meld identities with the pros is tied to a desire to get something out of a cookbook besides another recipe. For beneath those conscious enthusiasms and trends lies a new and deeper uncertainty in the relation between the recipe book and its reader. In this the Great Age of Disaggregation, all the old forms are being smashed apart and their contents spilled out like piñatas at a birthday party. The cookbook isn't spared. The Internet has broken what once seemed a natural tie, between the recipe and the cookbook, as it has broken the tie between the news story and the newspaper. You can find pretty much any recipe you want online now. If you need a recipe for mustard-shallot sauce or boeuf à la mode, you enter a few search terms, and there it is.

So the old question "What's the recipe for?" gives way to "What's the cookbook for?," which turns it, like everything else these days, toward the memoir, the confessional, the recipe as self-revelation. Barbara Lynch begins her book "Stir" with a preface that sounds like the opening passages of "GoodFellas": "We were poor, fiercely Irish, and extremely loyal. The older boys I knew grew up to be policemen, politicians and criminals (often a mix of the three.) . . . If I ever had thoughts at all as to what I might be when I grew up, they were modest ones. I might have pictured myself running a bar (in Southie) or opening a sub shop (in Southie). But having a restaurant of my own on Beacon Hill? No way. In fact, if a fortune teller had told me at fourteen what good things were in store for me, I would have laughed in her face and told her where she could shove such bullshit. . . . I marvel that any of us made it out of there without winding up in jail or the morgue." Michael Psilakis, in "How to Roast a Lamb," includes his own childhood traumas: "As I sat on top of the lamb, watching it struggle to free itself, as if in slow motion my father came up behind me, reached down over my right shoulder with a hunting knife, grabbed the lamb's head and ears, and, in one swift motion, slit the lamb's throat. . . . Blood shot out of the lamb like water from a high-pressure hose." You never had a moment like that with Julia Child or Joseph Wechsberg.

Another answer to the question "What good is the cookbook?" lies in what might be called the grammatical turn: the idea that what the cookbook should supply is the rules, the deep structure—a fixed, underlying grammar that enables you to *use* all the recipes you find. This grammatical turn is available in the popular "Best Recipe" series in *Cook's Illustrated*, and in the "Cook's Bible" of its editor, Christopher Kimball, in which recipes begin with a long



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disquisition on various approaches, ending with the best (and so brining was born); in Michael Ruhlman's "The Elements of Cooking," with its allusion to Strunk & White's usage guide; and, most of all, in Mark Bittman's indispensable new classic "How to Cook Everything," which, though claiming "minimalism" of style, is maximalist in purpose—not a collection of recipes for all occasions but a set of techniques for all time.

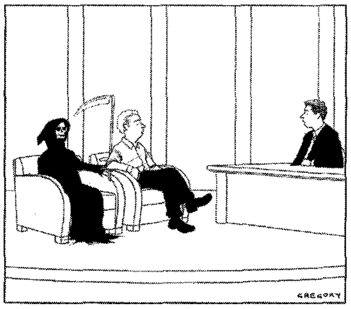
You see a progression if you compare the classics of the past century: Escoffier's culinary dictionary, Julia Child's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," Julee Rosso and Sheila Lukins's "The New Basics," and Bittman's recently revised "Everything." The standard kitchen bible, the book you turn to most often, has evolved from dictionary to encyclopedia, and to anthology and then grammar. Escoffier's book was pure dictionary: quick reminders to clarify a point or make a variation eloquent. Escoffier lists every recipe for tournedos and all its variations. His recipes are summaries, aide-mémoires for cooks who know how to make it already but need to be reminded what's in it. (Is a béarnaise sauce tarragon leaves and stems, or just leaves?) This was the way all cooks cooked once. (In the B. & O. cookbook, one finds this recipe for short ribs: "Put short ribs in a saucepan with one quart of nice stock, with one onion cut fine, steam until nice and tender. Place in roasting pan and put in oven until they are nice and brown." That's it. Everything else is commentary.)

In "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," as in Waverley Root's "The Food of France," which came out at around the same time, the turn is encyclopedic: here's all you can find on a particular kind of cooking, which you will master by reading this book. Things are explained, but, as in an encyclopedia, what is assumed is the need for more and deeper information about material already taken to be essential. You get a list not of everything there is but of everything that matters. Julia gives you only the tournedos recipes that count.

You didn't want to master the art of French cooking unless you believed that it was an art uniquely worth mastering. When people did master it, they realized that it wasn't—that no one style of cooking really was adequate to our appetites. So the cookbook as anthology arrived, open to many sources, from American Thanksgiving and Jewish brisket through Italian pasta and French Stroganoff—most successfully in "The New Basics" cookbook, which was the standard for the past generation. The anthology cookbooks assumed curiosity about styles and certainty about methods. In "The New Basics," the tone is chatty, informal, taking for granted that the readers—women, mostly—know the old basics: what should be in the kitchen, what kinds of machines to use, how to handle a knife.

The cookbooks of the grammatical turn assume that you don't know how to do the simple things, but that the simple things, mastered, will enable you to do it all. Bittman assumes that you have no idea how to chop an onion, or boil a potato, much less how chopping differs from slicing or from dicing. Each basic step is tenderly detailed. How to Boil Water: "Put water in a pot (usually to about two-thirds full), and turn the heat to high." How to Slice with a Knife: "You still press down, just with a little more precision, and cut into thick or thin slices of fairly uniform size." To sauté: "Put a large skillet on the stove and add the butter or oil. Turn the heat to medium-high. When the butter bubbles or the oil shimmers, add the food you want to sauté." Measuring dry ingredients, you are told to "scoop them up or use a spoon to put them in the cup." And, "Much of cooking is about heat."

This all feels masculine in tone—no pretty side drawings, a systematic progression from recipe to recipe—and seems written mainly for male readers who are either starting to cook for friends or just married and learning that if you don't cook she's not about to. The old "New Basics," one recalls nostalgically, was exclamatory and feminine. "The celebration continues," reads the blurb, and inside the authors "indulge" and "savor" and "delight"; a warm chicken salad is "perfection when dressed in even more lemon," another chicken salad is "lush and abundant." The authors' perpetual "we" ("We like all our holidays accompanied with a bit of the bubbly"), though meant, in part,



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to suggest a merry partnership, was generous and inclusive, a "we" that honest-to-God extended to all of their readers.

Bittman never gushes but always gathers up: he has seven ways to vary a chicken kebab; eighteen ideas for pizza toppings; and, the best, an "infinite number of ways to customize" mashed potatoes. He is cautious, and even, post-Pollan, skeptical; while Rosso and Lukins "love" and "crave" their filet of beef, to all of animal flesh Bittman allows no more than "Meat is filling and requires little work to prepare. It's relatively inexpensive and an excellent source of many nutrients. And most people like it." *Most people like it!* Rosso and Lukins would have tossed out any recipe, much less an entire food group, of which no more than that could be said. Lamb is a thing they "fall in love with again every season of the year," and of pork they know that it is "divinely succulent." Bittman thinks that most people like it. His tone is that of Ed Harris in "Apollo 13": Let's work the problem, people. Want to thicken a sauce? Well, try Plan A: cook it down. Copy that, Houston. Plan A inadequate? Try Plan B: add roux. And so on, ever upward, until you get to the old one, which they knew on the B. & O.: add a little cornstarch. The progressive pattern appeals to men. The implication, slightly illusory, is that there's a neat set of steps from each point to the next, as in a Bill Walsh pass pattern: each pattern on the tree proceeds logically and the quarterback just has to look a little farther upfield.

Grammars teach foreign tongues, and the advantage of Bittman's approach is that it can teach you how to cook. But is learning how to cook from a grammar book—item by item, and by rote—really learning how to cook? Doesn't it miss the social context—the dialogue of generations, the commonality of the family recipe—that makes cooking something more than just assembling calories and nutrients? It's as if someone had written a book called "How to Play Catch." ("Open your glove so that it faces the person throwing you the ball. As the ball arrives, squeeze the glove shut.") What it would tell you is not that we have figured out how to play catch but that we must now live in a culture without dads. In a world denuded of living examples, we end up with the guy who insists on making Malaysian Shrimp one night and Penne all'Amatriciana the next; it isn't about anything except having learned how it's done. Your grandmother's pound cake may have been like concrete, but it was about a whole history and view of life; it got that tough for a reason.

The metaphor of the cookbook was long the pet metaphor of the conservative political philosopher Michael Oakeshott in his assault on the futility of thinking that something learned by rote was as good as what was learned by ritual. Oakeshott's much repeated point was that one could no more learn how to make good government from a set of rules than one could learn how to bake a cake by reading recipe books. The cookbook, like the constitution, was only the residue of a practice. Even the most grammatical of cookbooks dies without living cooks to illuminate its principles. The history of post-independence African republics exists to prove the first point; that Chocolate Nemesis cake that always fails but your friends keep serving anyway exists to prove the second. Unsupported by your mom, the cookbook is the model of empty knowledge.

All this is true, and yet the real surprise of the cookbook, as of the constitution, is that it sometimes makes something better in the space between what's promised and what's made. You can follow the recipe for the exotic thing—green curry or paella—and though what you end up with would shock the natives, it may be just as good as or even better than the thing intended. Before I learned that green curries were soupy, I made them creamy, which actually is nicer. In politics, too, where the unwritten British constitution has been turned into a recipe—as in the constitutions of Canada and Australia—the condensation of practices into rules can make for a rain of better practices; the Canadian constitu-

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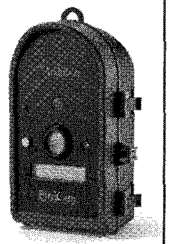
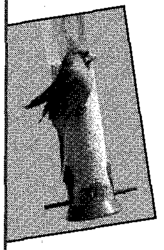
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tion, for instance, wanting to keep the bicameral vibe of a House of Lords without having a landed gentry, turned it into a Senate of distinguished citizens by appointment, an idea that can rebound back as a model for the new House of Lords. Between the rule and the meal falls the ritual, and the real ritual of the recipe is like the ritual of the law; the reason the judge sits high up, in a robe, is not that it makes a difference to the case but that it makes a difference to the clients. The recipe is, in this way, our richest instance of the force and the power of abstract rules. All messages change as they're re-sent; but messages not sent never get received. Life is like green curry.

However we take cookbooks—grammatically or encyclopedically, as storehouses of craft or illusions of knowledge—one can't read them in bed for many years without feeling that there is a conspiracy between readers and writers to obscure the ultimate point. A kind of primal scene of eating hovers over every cookbook, just as a primal scene of sex lurks behind every love story. In cooking, the primal scene, or substance, is salt, sugar, and fat held in maximum solution with starch; add protein as necessary, and finish with caffeine (coffee or chocolate) as desired. That's what, suitably disguised in some decent dimension of dressup, we always end up making. We make béarnaise sauce by whisking a stick of melted butter into a couple of eggs, and, now that we no longer make béarnaise sauce, we make salsa verde by beating a cup of olive oil into a fistful of anchovies. The herbs change; the hope does not.

Mark Peel, in his Campanile cookbook, comes near to giving the game away: "We chefs all lie about our mashed potatoes," he admits. "We don't tell you we've used 1½ pounds of cream and butter with 1¾ pounds of potatoes. You don't need to know." (Joël Robuchon, the king of his generation of French cooks, first became famous for a purée that had an even higher proportion of butter beaten into starch.) After reading hundreds of cookbooks, you may have the feeling that every recipe, every cookbook, is an attempt to get you to attain this ideal sugar-salt-saturated-fat state without having to see it head on, just as every love poem is an attempt to maneuver a girl or a boy into bed by talking as fast, and as eloquently, as possible about something else. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?/Thou art more lovely and more temperate" is the poetic equivalent of simmering the garlic with ginger and Sauternes before you put the cream in; the end is the cream, but you carefully simmer the garlic.

All appetites have their illusions, which are part of their pleasure. Going back to our own primal scene, that's why the husband turns those pages. The truth is that we don't passively look at the pictures and leap to the results; we actively read the lines and internally act out the jobs. The woman who reads the fashion magazines isn't passively imagining the act of having; she's actively imagining the act of shopping. (And distantly imagining the act of wearing.) She turns down pages not because she wants to look again but because, for that moment, she really intends to buy that—for a decisive imagined moment she *did* buy it, even if she knows she never will. Reading recipe books is an active practice, too, even if all the action takes place in your mind. We reanimate our passions by imagining the possibilities, and the act of wanting ends up mattering more than the fact of getting. It's not the false hope that it will turn out right that makes us go on with our reading but our being resigned to the knowledge that it won't ever, quite.

The desire to go on desiring, the wanting to want, is what makes you turn the pages—all the while aware that the next Boston cream pie, the sweet-salty-fatty-starchy thing you will turn out tomorrow, will be neither more nor less unsatisfying than last night's was. When you start to cook, as when you begin to live, you think that the point is to improve the technique until you end up with something perfect, and that the reason you haven't been able to break the cycle of desire and disillusion is that you haven't yet mastered the rules. Then you grow up, and you learn that that's the game. ♦

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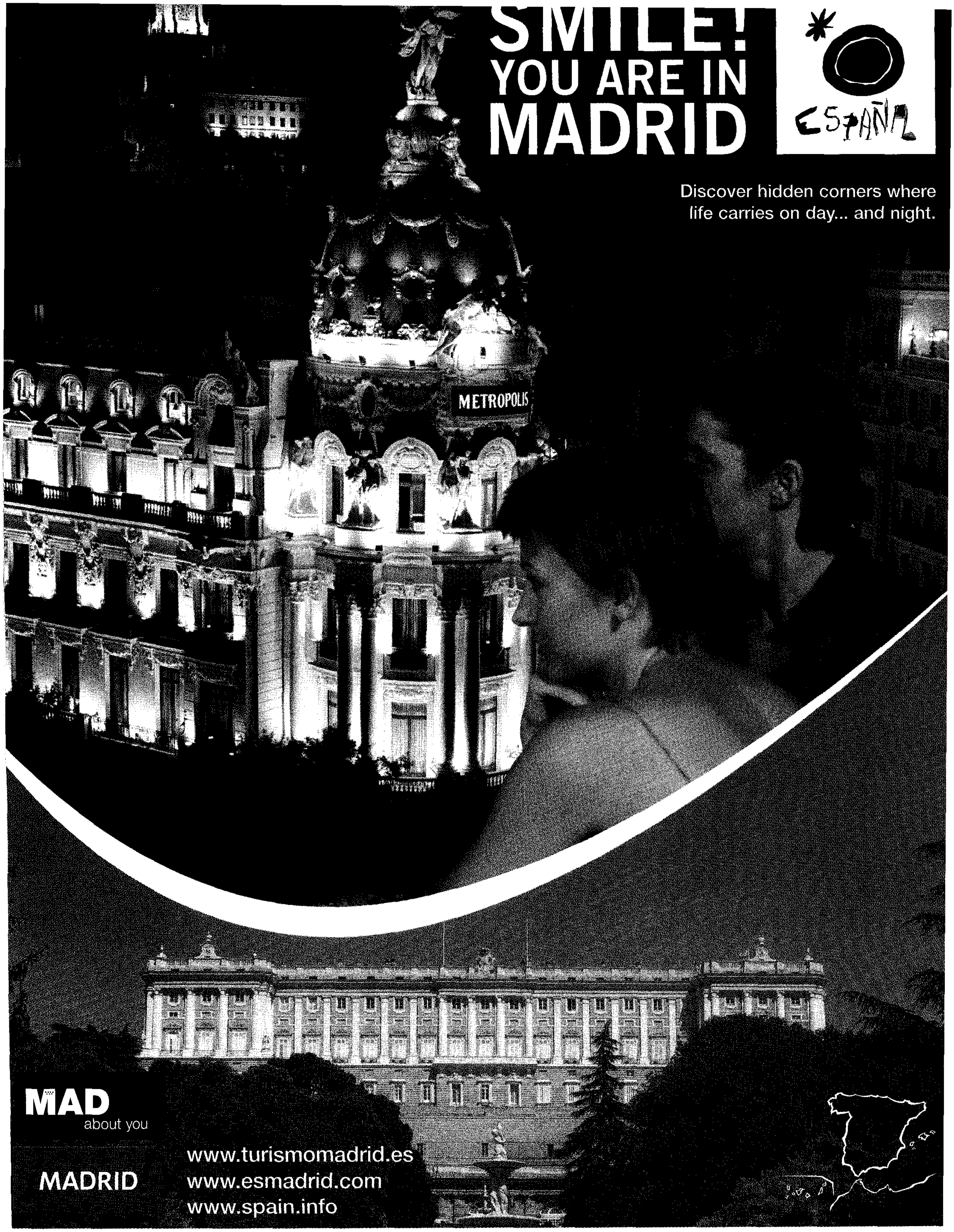
More on cookbooks on our literary blog.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Century of Art Added to Madrid's Prado

A top New York art critic has said that you cannot know great painting unless you've been to the Prado Museum. The occasion for his remarks was an expansion of the Madrid landmark two years ago, providing more space for works by Velázquez, Zurbarán, Murillo, Ribera, El Greco, and others who made Spanish painting synonymous with some of the world's finest art.

The enlarged premises, designed by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, have allowed for the opening last month of twelve new galleries devoted to nineteenth-century Spanish art. This means that for the first time visitors can trace the old masters through the generations that came after Francisco de Goya. Some of the nearly two hundred paintings and sculptures put on permanent display have never been shown before. The sequence is primarily chronological, with some galleries focused on Romanticism, historical painting, landscapes, and Naturalism.

Visitors to the Prado's twelve new galleries can now trace Spain's old masters, post-Goya.

The new exhibition begins, fittingly, with later works by Goya (1746–1820), who was an advisor to King Ferdinand VII and Queen Isabel de Braganza when they founded the Prado, in 1819. Of the 140 works by Goya in the museum, the first new gallery holds such exquisite portraits as "The Duchess of Abrantes" and "The Marchioness of Santa Cruz."

The legacy of Spanish portraiture is affirmed by the power in works by Federico de Madrazo (1815–1894) and Eduardo Rosales (1836–1873). The historical genre has an amazing impact in "Juana la Loca" by Francisco Pradilla (1848–1921). Landscapes surprise with realistic dramas by Carlos de Haes (1826–1898) and luminous scenes of Paris and Venice by Martín Rico (1833–1908). The delicacy of the nineteenth-century embrace of Asian art is epitomized by Mariano Fortuny's (1838–1894) depiction of "The Painter's Children in the Japanese Room." Goya's vivid women are recalled by those of Raimundo de Madrazo (1841–1920).

But as Spain is known for its brilliant light, so are its painters famous for capturing it, and no modernist more so than Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923). His paintings fill a gallery with magnetic color—a celebration exemplified in "Boys on the Beach." It is followed by a temporary installation of evocative landscapes by Sorolla's friend Aureliano de Beruete (1845–1912).

These new galleries bring the Prado's story of Spanish painting, beginning with twelfth-century Romanesque artists, to a culmination in dazzling Impressionism. In the next few years the museum plans to increase, by about half, the number of works it displays—adding suspense to the pleasures of repeat visits.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW GALLERIES COURTESY OF THE MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO

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BRIEFLY NOTED

Dorothea Lange, *by Linda Gordon (Norton; $35).* Dorothea Lange, the photographer responsible for many of the most affecting images of poverty during the Depression, was "a bit of a social snob," according to Gordon's absorbing biography, and for the better. In the twenties, Lange was San Francisco's top society photographer, and Gordon argues that what she learned while photographing the wealthy—how to put subjects at ease, the use of flattering angles and compositional strategies—prepared her to take singularly dignified portraits of people in less fortunate circumstances, from men in breadlines to her famous "Migrant Mother" and, later, Japanese-Americans interned at Manzanar. Gordon's accounts of Lange's unconventional marriages and of her "dubious decisions" as a mother (while she took pictures of distressed families, her own children lived in paid foster care) are equally perceptive and, ultimately, sympathetic. Gordon shows that in Lange's mind her work and her sacrifices were for the American people: "They were like military service."

Lit, *by Mary Karr (Harper; $25.99).* This affecting memoir—the third in a series that includes "The Liar's Club" and "Cherry"—documents Karr's alcoholism, the breakdown of her marriage, and the unlikely redemption she finds in the Catholic Church. Chased out of Texas by the memories of a horrific childhood, Karr establishes herself as a writer and in graduate school meets a patrician man who becomes her husband. But days spent home alone with their young son find her drinking as her mother once did, "as if our gene pool owed the universe at least one worthless drunk at a time." Karr's lurch toward faith is narrated with her familiar irreverence and humor, but this tone does not preclude a more heartfelt expression of the value of faith: "I'd feared surrender would sand me down to nothing. Now I've started believing it can bloom me more solidly into myself."

The Lacuna, *by Barbara Kingsolver (HarperCollins; $26.99).* In Kingsolver's capacious historical novel, Harrison Shepherd, the son of a Mexican flirt and a stolid American bureaucrat, has a remarkable life: cook for Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, secretary to Trotsky, and acclaimed author denounced as a Communist by HUAC. The story is narrated mostly through Shepherd's journal entries, with occasional interpolations by his literary executor. There are some lapses into gum-cracking, slang-filled dialogue, and the latter half of the book, which takes place in North Carolina, suffers from the relative insipidity of the setting. The most compelling moments occur when Trotsky, in exile and fearing assassination, takes refuge with Rivera and is seduced by Kahlo. Kingsolver's descriptions of life in Mexico City burst with sensory detail—thick sweet breads, vividly painted walls, the lovely white feet of an unattainable love.

The Chill, *by Romano Bilenchi (translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein; Europa; $15).* "The chill of suspicion and incomprehension came between me and humankind when I was sixteen," Bilenchi's spare, dark bildungsroman begins. Following an unnamed teen-ager's initiation into adulthood in Tuscany in the Fascist years, it is a series of episodes of alienation, narrated in a frank, flat voice. In a sickeningly swift eighty pages, the protagonist becomes aware of the petty and vicious nature of his fellow-townspeople, of his increasing estrangement from friends and family, and of his first grotesque (if fascinating) stirrings of sexuality. Manipulated and dominated by the adults around him, he concludes that "it wasn't possible to live among other people if all of a sudden they could attack one another with such ferocity." Most coming-of-age novels illuminate the tumultuous inner world of adolescence; Bilenchi's reveals the brutality of the adulthood that surrounds it.

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POP MUSIC

YIPS AND RIDDLES

The art of musical hiccups.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In 2007, for Dirty Projectors' fifth full album, "Rise Above," the group's leader, David Longstreth, composed, from memory, a new version of "Damaged," Black Flag's 1981 album, radically altering both the lyrics and the music. "I listened to 'Damaged' a lot as a teen-ager in middle school," Longstreth told me recently. "I loved it to pieces, and then moved on. I didn't listen to it for about ten years." The Black Flag album is a series of constrained, desperate punk songs that push the emotional and physical capabilities of the band. The singer, Henry Rollins, barks about depression, cops, and other obstacles to teen-age happiness: "Thirsty and miserable, always wanting more." "Damaged" is a cry from misfits. Longstreth's "Rise Above" is a block of swirling music made to suit another kind of misfit, not necessarily an anxious one. It was helpful to be told up front that "Rise Above" was related to Black Flag's "Damaged," because it would have taken me ages to hear one album in the other.

Longstreth, who was a music major at Yale, is not interested in making things easy for his listeners, but he's not a tease. The band's latest effort, "Bitte Orca," is a coherent, meaty album that makes his language so clear that I've been able to go back and use it to translate the band's earlier work. I was drawn to "Rise Above" because of its confidence and its wild curlicues. That didn't mean that I could always find a way in. The main elements of Dirty Projectors albums were there: Longstreth's voice, which tends toward a convulsive yip; his guitar playing, which renders tricky patterns in a fluid way that doesn't blur the edges; and several female voices, hovering, sometimes in harmony, sometimes cracking a song into bits. There are echoes of various African guitar styles in Longstreth's playing, though none stick around long enough to lay a specific claim. Like Hendrix, Longstreth is a lefty who plays a right-handed Strat upside down. Despite the oddness of his songs, he plays in standard tuning.

Longstreth employs a method for arranging voices known as hocketing, which stretches back to the work of thirteenth-century French monks. To hocket, you split up a melody or a chord and assign the notes to different voices. (It's like an advanced version of those "Sesame Street" segments where Muppets individually say the syllables of a word and then combine to say the entire word together.) When voices begin to hocket (the word is related to "hiccup"), the sound starts to flicker and pop, as if the chords and melodies were multiplying like soap bubbles. (Hocketing is the mirror ball of arranging.) The effect is most striking live. There's your band, standing still, but the music is rotating all over the stage.

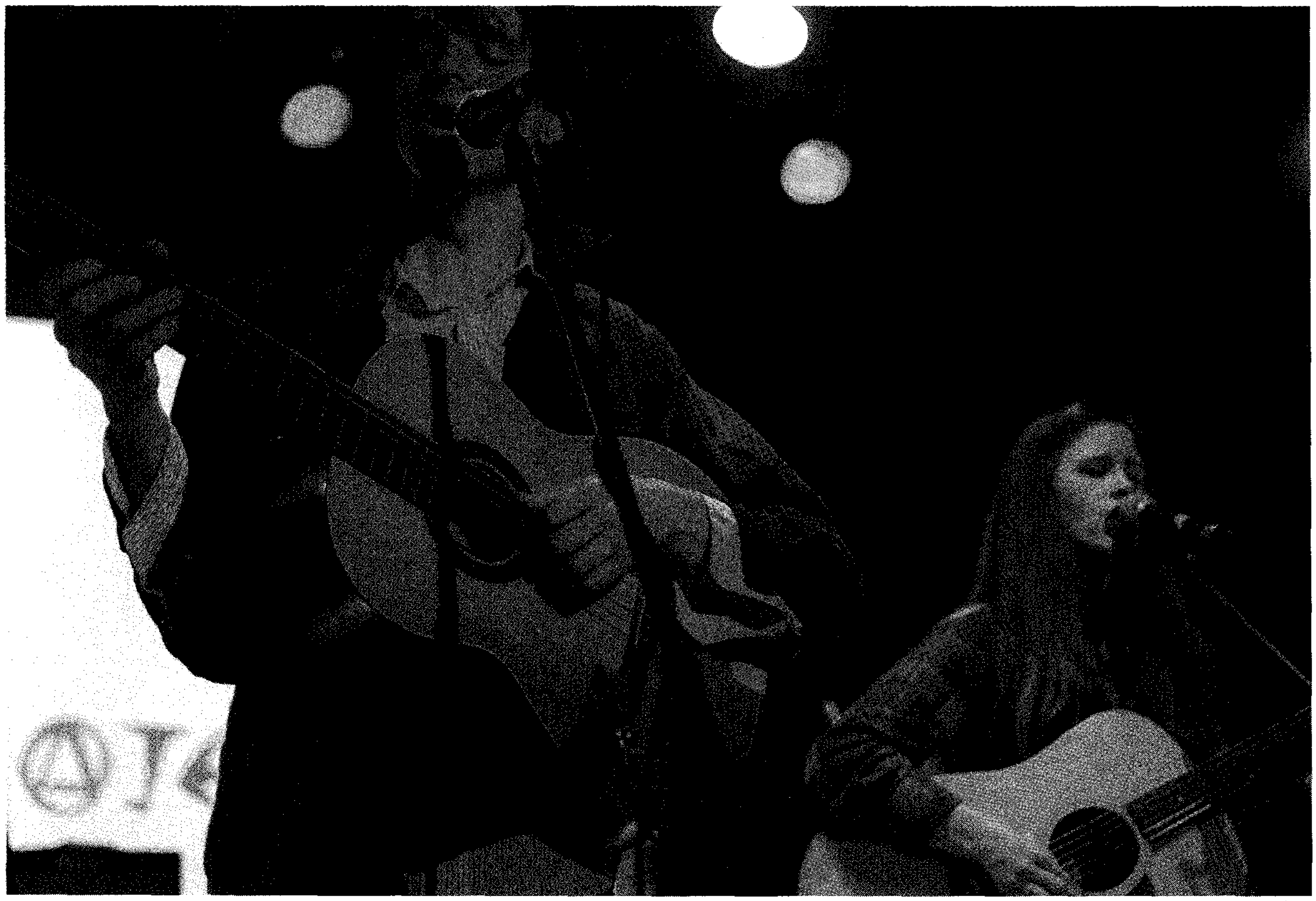
"Rise Above" is so dense with leaps and left turns that it can seem algebraic: something demanding your full attention, best undertaken episodically, and not for long. "Bitte Orca" distributes Longstreth's style over a flatter surface, and hands over many of the vocals to the three remarkable women in his band: the guitarist and singer Amber Coffman, the singer and keyboardist Angel Deradoorian, and the singer Haley Dekle. That may be the secret here—an entire album of Longstreth's singing is perhaps more challenging than any of his other moves. Although earlier Dirty Projectors albums are stocked with rhythm, "Bitte Orca" is the first to sound as if it had a traditional rhythm section—the fabulously heavy drummer Brian Mcomber and the bassist Nat Baldwin.

"Cannibal Resource" opens the album with an easeful blast, a careful step into Longstreth's mandarin ways. Unaccompanied, Longstreth plays a series of small, torqued-up chords through tremolo and a phaser. We could be anywhere at this point—there's no telling what continent we're going to land on when everyone else shows up. Baldwin sneaks into the chords with intermittent flashes of bass, and then Mcomber enters with a straight backbeat. For once, Longstreth's chords sound like ordinary rock-and-roll fifths; this is about as close to normalcy as the band gets. But the scene switches quickly, even when the time signature is straight. In ninety seconds, we go full circle. Longstreth is singing high, but smoother than before: "Look around at every-one. Everyone looks alive and waiting." A moment later, he sings, "We are still counting on cannibal resource." (Like people?) The women sing above and around Longstreth—"ah-ah" and "oh-eh" and "eh-oh"—and make a shiny backdrop behind his sword-waving voice. Chords come in clumps of acoustic and electric sound lashed together. Longstreth can spin out lines and counterlines easily, and the lyrics suggest that he is a problem solver, not a crowd-pleaser. Slightly rearranged, though, the spiralling melodies and the sharp tones become generous and inviting. Longstreth's detail and his variation are no longer a riddle built for one; "Bitte Orca" turns all that technique and compositional brawn toward the audience.

Live, the band sometimes wanders back to the abstract side of the street. Maybe this is a by-product of having a single, demanding composer leading a band. (Rehearsals are apparently quite long.) Longstreth is over six feet tall, and slightly stooped. The eccentricity of the music is not reflected in his speech or in his movements. He and the three women maintain an odd sort of calm that sometimes reads as disdain or distance, though it's probably simply concentration.

This summer, on the Williamsburg waterfront, the band played a set with unusually good sound in near-perfect weather. The audience was quiet and respectful. The band easily pulled off the tricky back-and-forth singing of "Remade Horizon," a glorious song that moves from a lilting opening, in which Longstreth sings about a "back yard" and a "residential neighborhood," into a series of bright and rowdy vocal tennis matches among all four voices. Even so, I found myself not lifting off with the band.

Back in my apartment, though, "Bitte Orca" just got better. Though it easily repays listening, it is still as layered and restless as Longstreth's earlier work. You don't get easy verse-chorus-verse patterns, or any of those conveniences of pop-song form that allow a performer to go a little nuts and let muscle memory bring back the chords. Songs do repeat motifs and sections, but often with so many variations that you never seem to pass the same corner twice. Longstreth's material is riddled with information, and I often end up closing my eyes when the album is on. I generally react physically to intense music, but Dirty Projectors make me happiest when I don't. ("Stillness Is the Move" is not just a song title—it's a suggested usage.) Just as the album format is being nudged to the economic sidelines, "Bitte Orca" pushes back and says, "Sit. Stay. Listen." ♦



Guitar algebra: Dirty Projectors' David Longstreth and Amber Coffman. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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ON TELEVISION

UNHEAVENLY HOST

Fox News Channel's latest blowhard.

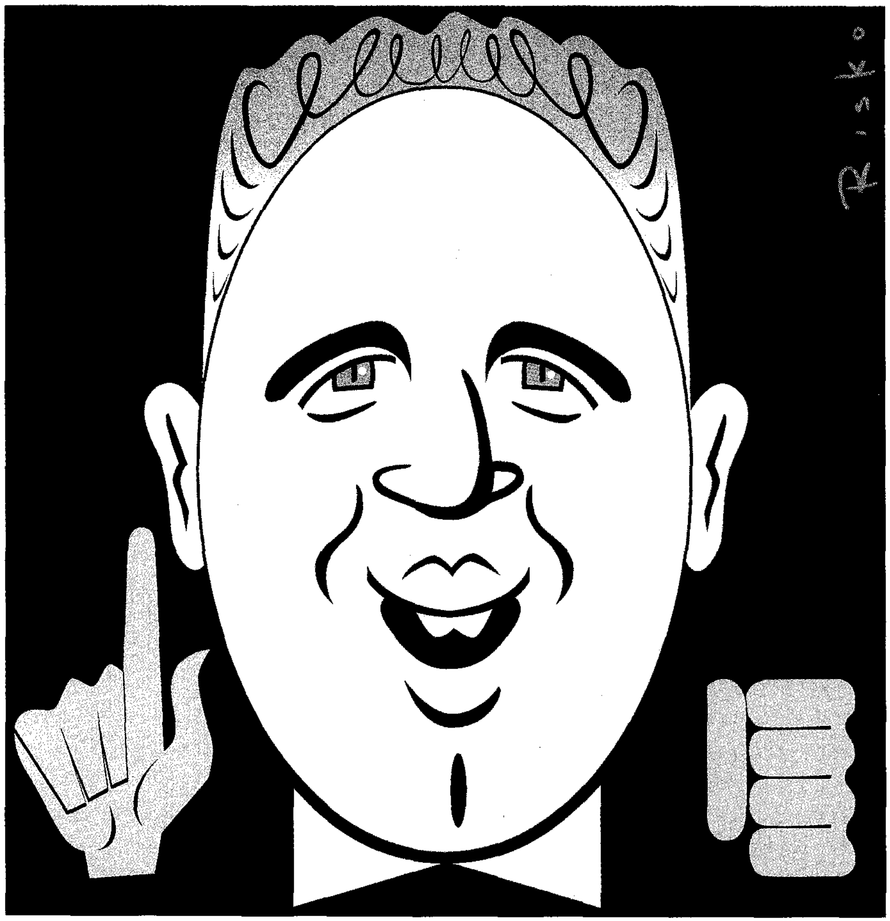
BY NANCY FRANKLIN

If you sensed something of a quiet spell about ten days ago, a lull in the usual media storm, it may have been owing to the fact that Glenn Beck, the energetically hateful, truth-twisting radio and Fox News Channel talk-show host, was absent from the airwaves for a week, to have his appendix removed. A few days after his surgery, he made it clear, via his Twitter feed, that he hated just watching TV, which is, of course, the terrible fate of those of us who don't have talk shows. ("I know how U feel. Watching the news & knowing wht I say 2 my tv makes no difference," he wrote. "I cnt wait 2 giv U wht I think has bn going on.") By the middle of last week, he was back, breathing fire about Obama's response to the Fort Hood shootings.

The persona that Beck has cobbled together over the past few years combines a determination to draw attention to himself, because what he has to say is so important, with an outsized, in-your-face show of modesty—he likes to refer to himself as a fatty (he's barely overweight) and a clown, and, like many an egomaniac throughout history, he takes pains to present himself as a regular guy, shrugging his shoulders and saying, "But what do I know?" He declares himself no special friend to either Democrats or Republicans, and claims to be a libertarian, but his agenda is to throw tacks in front of the wheels of progress and, specifically, to make the Obama Administration crash and burn. Beck looks cherubic, with his boyish crewcut, his rubbery, expressive face, his wide eyes, and his seemingly innocent smile, but he has a wizened heart and a sulfurous outlook on American life and politics.

Some see him as a joke, and some see him as a danger, and some—especially those who like guns, don't want health-care reform, and feel that their freedom is somehow threatened by every political initiative of the Obama Administration—are grateful to him, for his efforts to "take back America." In March, Beck started the 9.12 Project—a forum for frustrated folks, meant to "bring us all back to the place we were on September 12, 2001." On that day, the Project's online mission statement says, "we were not obsessed with Red States, Blue States or political parties. We were united as Americans, standing together to protect the greatest nation ever created." It's true—we were. But nothing about Beck's 9.12 Project has even a tinge of that post-9/11 spirit of generosity. One of the "principles" of the organization is "I work hard for what I have and I will share it with who I want to. Government cannot force me to be charitable." Beck invariably uses his real or feigned bromance with the Founding Fathers to explain his crabbed selfishness; he justifies this "principle" with a quote from George Washington, which actually has an entirely different spirit: "It is not every-one who asketh that deserveth charity; all however, are worth of the inquiry or the deserving may suffer."

Beck's negative, regressive take on politics is expressed with raw-throated outrage, smiley sarcasm, and, occasionally, a display of hurt, even tears. He's very effective at putting himself over, but it's unclear why he has been so effective at rallying people—and also unclear, for all his bluster, what it is, exactly, that he wants them to do, beyond keep on watching and listening to him and buying his books. He is Mr. Synergy: to give one example, his book "The Christmas Sweater," based on his personal journey of redemption, comes in two versions, one for adults and one for children, and he performed the story around the country as a stage show. The performance was filmed and will play in movie theatres this holiday season. In a video advertising the movie on his Web site, he says that he got so many letters from people saying that the tale had changed their lives that he started yet another Web site, called Face Your Storm, on which they could tell their own stories. In a tweet last week, after saying that Republicans and Democrats have a reason to fear 2010—the kind of rumbling, ominous, yet unspecific warning that is typical of Beck—he wrote, "Tell yr friends & C U a week from Sat in The Villages, FL. FREE RALLY." (The Villages is an enormous retirement community in central Florida, almost entirely white, and with such a high percentage of lever pullers that campaigning politicians make a point of going there.) The rally is also, not surprisingly, a book signing for Beck. There have been 9.12 demonstrations all over the country this year, and tens of thousands of people showed up to demonstrate in Washington on September 12th—an unofficial count put the number at between fifty and seventy thousand people. (That's impressive, though not as impressive as the absurdly overinflated figure of 1.7 million, which Beck cited on the morning show "Fox & Friends.")



Bend it like Beck: Glenn Beck scores points with his political distortions.

ROBERT RISKO

Beck moved to Fox News from CNN Headline News at the beginning of 2009, and his ratings, which were good to begin with, have gone up significantly since midsummer, when, from his bottomless grab bag of fearmongering and inciteful comments about the coming "redistribution of wealth," and the revolutionaries who want to take away our freedom, and the apparently satanic form of capitalism called eco-capitalism, and Mao-loving politicians, he pulled out a doozy. It was a couple of days before the "beer summit" at the White House—the sitdown that Obama arranged for Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and the policeman who had arrested him outside his house a few weeks earlier. Beck said, on "Fox & Friends," "This President, I think, has exposed himself as a guy, over and over and over again, who has a deep-seated hatred for white people, or the white culture, I don't know what it is." It's not a logical impossibility for anyone, even for a person who is half black and half white, to make a racist statement, but Beck's act of malice was, to say the least, stupid—and, it could be argued, not without its own whiff of racism. Although a number of advertisers subsequently boycotted the show, Beck did not retreat, and the media emperor Rupert Murdoch, who owns Fox News, supported him, saying in a recent interview that Obama "did make a very racist comment, uh, about, you know, blacks and whites and so on." (In the same interview, Murdoch defended Fox News's prideful characterization of itself as "fair and balanced.")

Throughout the year, Beck has gone after Administration officials, repeatedly showing irresponsibly edited video clips, in which they say things that make them easy marks. Sometimes, though, the clips really do raise questions about someone's judgment or self-awareness, even when you hear a longer version of the comments. Take Anita Dunn, the former White House director of communications. (She was filling the post this year on an interim basis and left last week.) Dunn gave a speech at a Maryland high school—Beck played a snippet so often that you could repeat it by heart—in which she clumsily used a quotation from Mao as a positive life lesson, and it's no wonder Beck latched on to it. Van Jones, who was brought in by Obama to spearhead the creation of green jobs, was undone, in part, by Beck's ceaseless screenings of his video past, and resigned in September. (The Administration should have known that some of Jones's speeches, and other questionable parts of his record, would be made public; the Internet-savvyness of the Obama Presidential campaign seemed to vanish not long after the election.)

A headline at the top of Beck's Web site announces what he thinks he's selling: "the fusion of entertainment and enlightenment." If by this Beck means that his product is radioactive, he's got that right. We can only hope that its toxic charge will fade over time. But that seems unlikely. At the end of the Elia Kazan–Budd Schulberg movie "A Face in the Crowd," the Arkansas opportunist and petty criminal who has been repackaged, by a radio broadcaster, as a guitar-playing professional hayseed called Lonesome Rhodes (played brilliantly by Andy Griffith), and who has been consumed and ruined by fame, shows his true colors when he bad-mouths his audience over an open mike. The nation abandons him, and, as the movie ends, he's shouting, unheard, into the night. These days, because of the Internet, it's not so easy to get rid of a demagogue. Long after Beck leaves radio and TV, his sound bites will still be with us. ♦

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THE SKY LINE

SURFACE TENSION

Jean Nouvel and the art of the façade.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

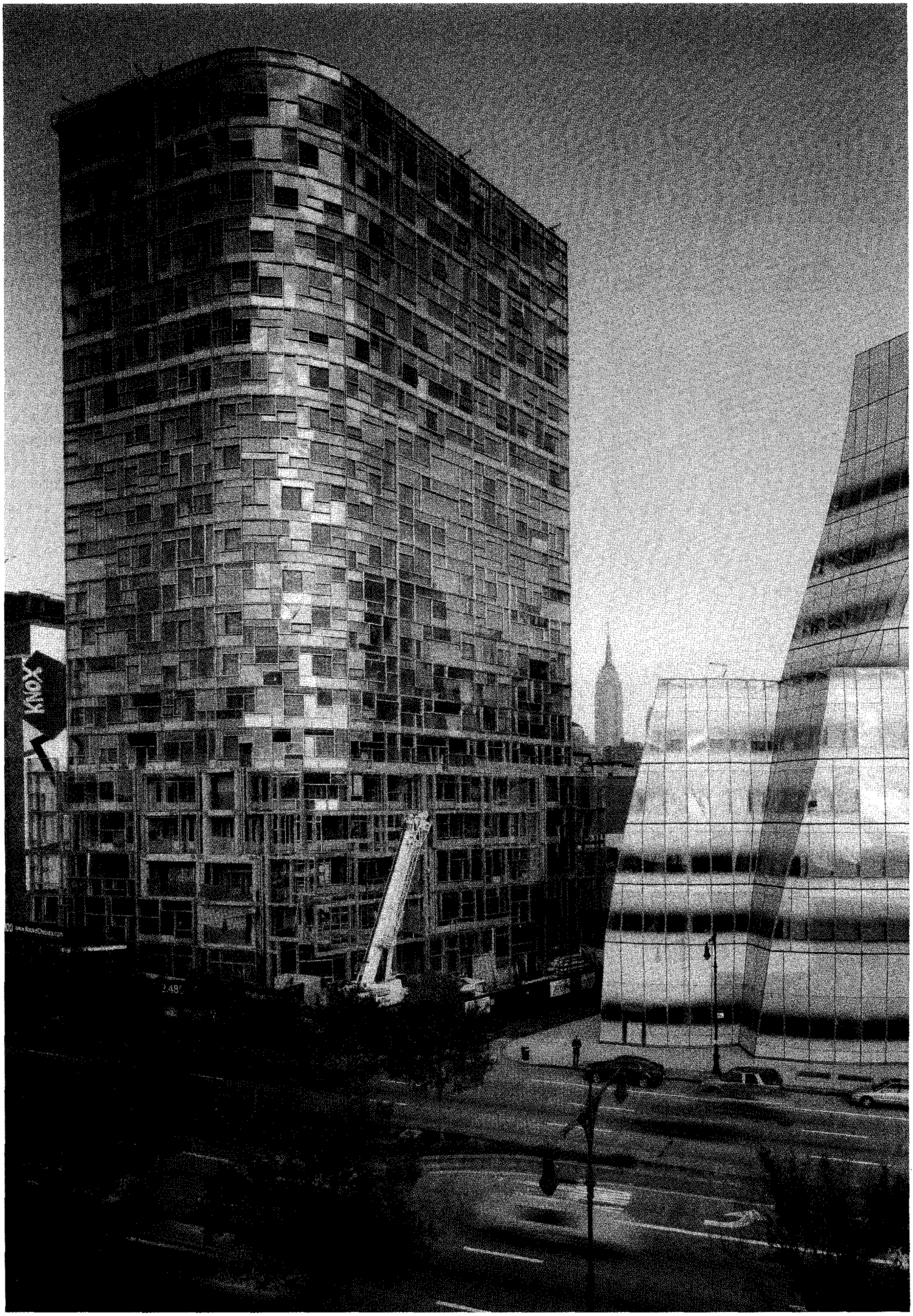
When you catch your first glimpse of 100 Eleventh Avenue, a new apartment tower in Chelsea designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel, its curving façade, an abstract arrangement of windows slanting in multiple directions, looks like a gimmick. The building clatters; it jangles like a bracelet. Beside the smooth, milky-white exterior of Frank Gehry's I.A.C. Building, across Nineteenth Street, it seems nervous, and even the architect's description of it, "a vision machine," smacks of trying too hard. But Nouvel, one of the world's most famous and prolific architects, is anything but insecure. Often when an architect hits you with razzle-dazzle, it's because that's all he's got. Nouvel's buildings, however, not only grab you; they get you thinking about architecture in a more serious way.

Nouvel, who is sixty-four, won the Pritzker Prize last year, but his name is still probably better known than any of his buildings—particularly in the United States, where he hadn't built anything until 2006, when his Guthrie Theatre, in Minneapolis, opened (a brawny building sheathed in dark-blue steel, with a large cantilever overlooking the Mississippi). Furthermore, it's not easy to characterize his work; his buildings share no immediately recognizable style. Yet almost all of them have a harsh, tough beauty and represent an attempt to elicit an emotional response through the provocative use of modern materials. Taschen has published a grandiose monument to his career—"Jean Nouvel by Jean Nouvel: Complete Works 1970-2008" ($200)—and when you leaf through the book you see certain themes recurring, especially a fascination with façades and with blurring the boundary between inside and outside. The sheer variety of the work keeps you turning the pages: the book is less a catalogue raisonné than a story in which you want to see what the protagonist is going to do next.

Nouvel was relatively unknown outside Paris until the mid-nineteen-eighties, when he won the design competition for one of François Mitterrand's Grands Projets, the Arab World Institute, on the Left Bank of the Seine. Nouvel devised a façade with thirty thousand light-sensitive metal diaphragms behind glass. Opening and closing like camera shutters, the diaphragms were designed to control the penetration of light into the building, but they also mimic the perforations of a *mashrabiya*, a kind of latticework screen common on the windows of Arabian buildings. Rather than simply coming up with a pastiche of Arabic architecture, like the Paris Mosque, Nouvel evoked an Arabic aesthetic with a distinctively high-tech, Western building.

Soon afterward, Nouvel designed his so-called Tour sans Fins (Tower Without End), for La Défense, the skyscraper district at the western edge of Paris. A hundred-story cylinder whose glass exterior became lighter and more transparent as it rose, the building was designed to disappear into the clouds. The project was never built, but it marked an important step in Nouvel's fascination with a façade's potential for ambiguity. The more recent Cartier Foundation, also in Paris, is a glass box whose façade extends beyond the sides of the building. In front of the building is a garden and, in front of that, a freestanding plane of glass, intentionally blurring the distinction between the garden wall and the building wall. In Barcelona, Nouvel's Torre Agbar, a round skyscraper that narrows toward a rounded top, has an experimental façade of a different sort. The building's shape bears an obvious resemblance to Norman Foster's so-called Gherkin building, in London, but the differences are telling. Whereas Foster's tower is crisp and light, Nouvel's—covered with thousands of tiny panes of glass that open and close like

Nouvel's new condo tower on Eleventh Avenue. Photograph by Robert Polidori.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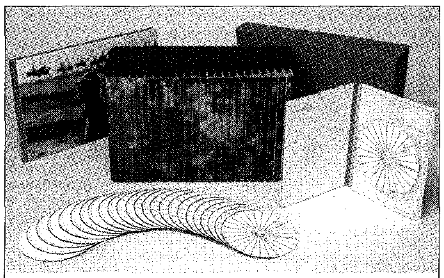

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casement windows, and reveal a pattern of flowing colors behind them—is so richly textured that it looks as if it were made not of glass at all but of some indeterminate material. Nouvel has called it "a mirage."

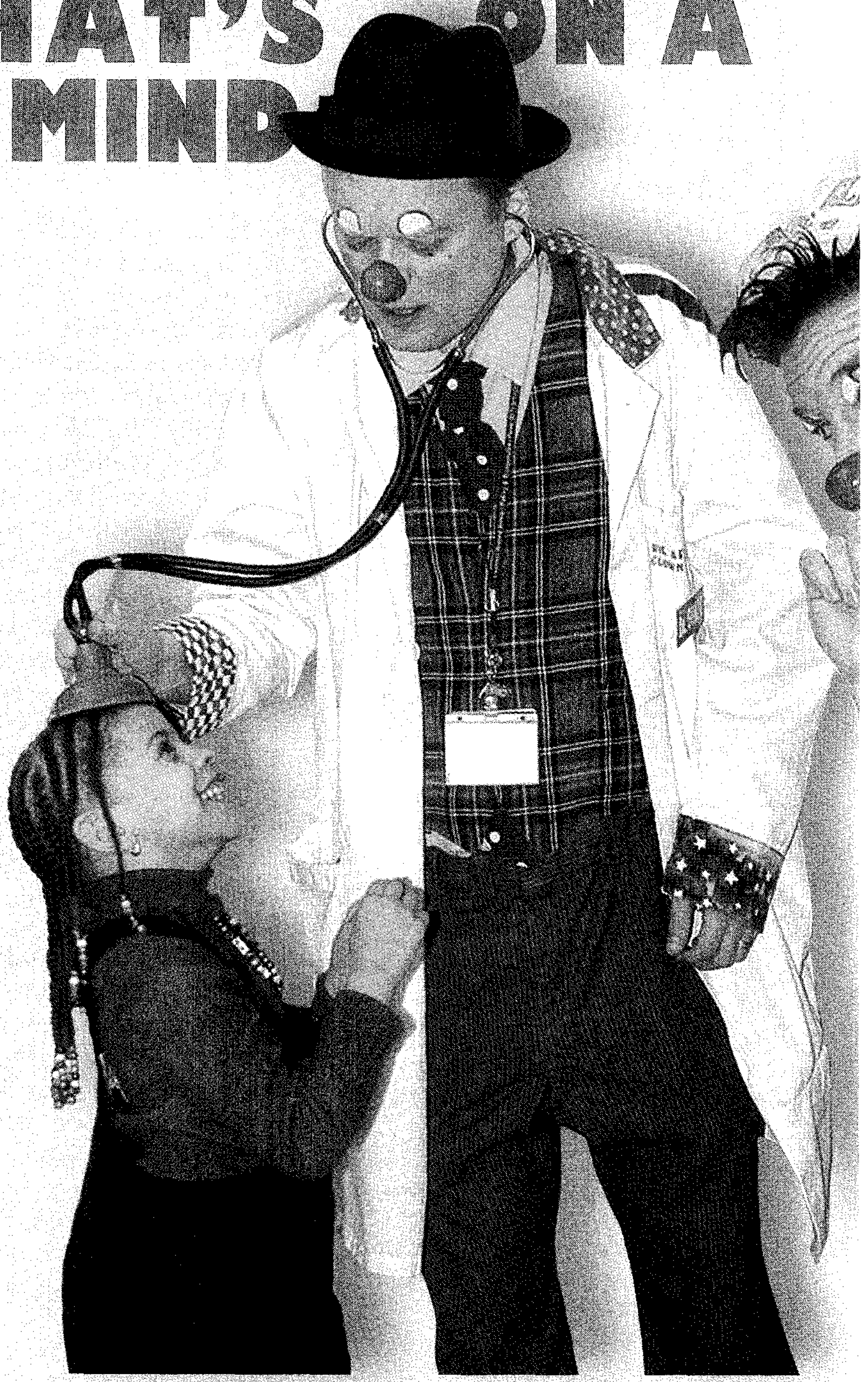
In a New York condominium market reshaped by the likes of Richard Meier and Charles Gwathmey, it was inevitable that developers would want to hire Nouvel, and 100 Eleventh Avenue is, in fact, his second New York apartment building. The first, a glass block at 40 Mercer Street, in SoHo, that was finished in 2007, is surprisingly understated. Nouvel, it seems, was no match for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The building has a front of blue glass set into steel frames, and its scale and its texture fit gracefully into the nineteenth-century streetscape. But it's so well mannered that it doesn't feel entirely like Nouvel.

On Eleventh Avenue, there wasn't a clear urban fabric for Nouvel to fit into: to the south and east are Gehry's building and the development surrounding the High Line; to the north are the nondescript foothills of midtown. The site is L-shaped, and the inside of the L, facing midtown, is austere: windows of varying sizes and shapes are punched into a solid wall of black brick. Nouvel saves his showmanship for the other side, the façade rounding the corner of Eleventh Avenue and Nineteenth Street. It is made up of enormous prefabricated metal grids, each containing an arrangement of windows of different sizes and shapes, with the glass angled in every conceivable direction. When the whole thing is put together, it looks like a vast, reflective Mondrian, or like huge glass shingles, randomly assembled. Each of the angled windowpanes—there are more than sixteen hundred—reflects light slightly differently, making the building glitter like sequins in the afternoon sun. If you are tired of the way every modern building feels flatter and thinner than the one before it, well, so is Jean Nouvel.

The curving façade maximizes the number of apartments that have river views. Nouvel, unlike many architects who responded to the call of developers to design high-end condominiums when the market was still white-hot, paid serious attention to the interior. No one can accuse him of tweaking an ordinary building and slapping his name on it to sell apartments. Talking to an interviewer once about working for developers, Nouvel said that if a building is "only the result of an economic situation, it can't have meaning." The apartments are awash with light, arrestingly refracted by the irregular pattern of the windows, and Nouvel designed every detail, from squared-off sinks and bathtubs, with faucets that operate by touch, to rolling stainless-steel kitchen cabinetry. There is a dark, serene lobby with windows giving onto a garden at the rear, in which trees sit in midair on planters built into the main structure. There is a seventy-foot swimming pool that is both indoors and outdoors: it starts in the basement and extends into the lower level of a garden courtyard.

For all the attention this building is getting, Nouvel is probably best known in New York for a building that he has not built, or, at least, not yet—an eighty-two-story tower planned for a tiny site on West Fifty-third Street beside the Museum of Modern Art. As originally designed, the tower was to rise to twelve hundred and fifty feet, the height of the Empire State Building. But the planned building was anything but bulky: around a slender glass tower, Nouvel wrapped a spire of steel bracing that extends beyond the building's floors to form a needle-thin peak.

The building's neighbors were aghast, viewing it as an unnecessary intrusion into an already overcrowded part of midtown Manhattan. In October, the City Planning Commission approved the project but insisted that Nouvel take off two hundred feet, removing the top of the steel frame. It's a bad compromise: the tower, still too big to satisfy the neighbors, is also a lot less graceful. The chairman of the commission, Amanda Burden, said she didn't feel that Nouvel's top was good enough to be in the company of the Empire State Building, so the commission decided that it shouldn't challenge that building's preëminence in the midtown skyline. The commission wanted, in effect, to landmark the sky. Kurt Vonnegut once described Manhattan, ironically, as "Skyscraper National Park," and it's as if the commission had taken him literally. The trouble is that it's impossible to keep a Nouvel design and eviscerate it at the same time. Nouvel's designs, for all their bombast, are conceived as a whole. You can take them or leave them, but tone them down and you've missed the point. ♦



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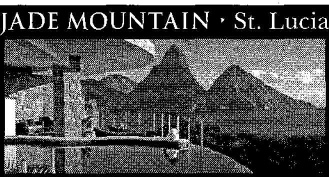

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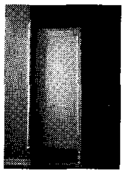

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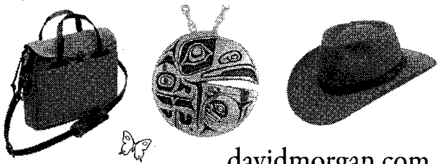

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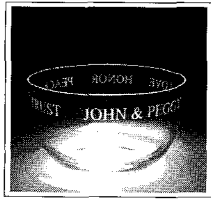

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THE THEATRE

BLACK AND BLUE-BLOOD

A revival of "Ragtime."

BY HILTON ALS

In old white America—New Rochelle, circa 1906, to be exact—difference usually kept to its place. "There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants," E. L. Doctorow writes of the privileged world he renders so magnificently in his 1974 novel, "Ragtime." With short, declarative sentences, Doctorow creates a sort of verbal daguerreotype of New Rochelle: "There seemed to be no entertainment that did not involve great swarms of people. Trains and steamers and trolleys moved them from one place to another. That was the style, that was the way people lived. Women were stouter then. They visited the fleet carrying white parasols. Everyone wore white in summer." But down in Manhattan another whole world was growing and spreading, one that would eventually push up against, and irrevocably change, this sheltered town in Westchester County. That other world—inhabited by Jewish and Italian immigrants and blacks—was not brightened by the soft light that Winslow Homer loved to paint. The immigrants, Doctorow writes, "were despised by New Yorkers. They stank of fish and garlic. They had running sores. They had no honor and worked for next to nothing." And, as for the blacks, they lived in some dark and inaccessible place called Harlem.

The way that Doctorow is able to bring these worlds together, while capturing America's burgeoning interest in celebrity as it helped to shape a new urban landscape, provides much of the excitement that one experiences while reading "Ragtime." (In addition to winning the 1975 National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, Doctorow's third novel was voted one of the hundred best novels of the twentieth century by the Modern Library.) The creators of the 1998 musical version of "Ragtime" (now in revival at the Neil Simon)—Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens wrote the book, the score, and the lyrics, respectively—certainly take advantage of Doctorow's imaginative verve, particularly at the beginning of the show. But, unfortunately, they also drag the production down with a number of clichés and caricatures that soften and undermine Doctorow's unsentimental, loving but tough point of view.

We open on Derek McLane's gorgeous set, sensitively lit by Donald Holder. The forty-member cast stands on or below three tiers of iron balconies that wrap around the stage. These balconies, with their fine grillwork, recall the tenement fire escapes where New York City's poor hung out, and shouted their news, on many a dreadful hot summer day; they also evoke the porch of the sprawling house in New Rochelle that is the home of the Little Boy (Christopher Cox), his Father (Ron Bohmer), his Mother (Christiane Noll), his Mother's Younger Brother (the exceptional Bobby Steggert), and his Grandfather (Dan Manning). So much will happen to change this family during the next two hours and forty minutes, but for now we can simply admire what they are wearing (their high-calibre white costumes are by Santo Loquasto) as they stand, ramrod straight, opposite the play's black and Jewish characters. Some of the Jewish men wear prayer shawls and yarmulkes; a red blossom peeks from a black woman's hair. After a moment of silence, a sweet-faced black man in a checkered suit, who is sitting at a silhouette of a piano, center stage, mimes noodling a tune—the beginning of a ragtime song. His name is Coalhouse Walker, Jr. (the strong and personable Quentin Earl Darrington). The Little Boy walks to the apron of the stage and says, directly to the audience:

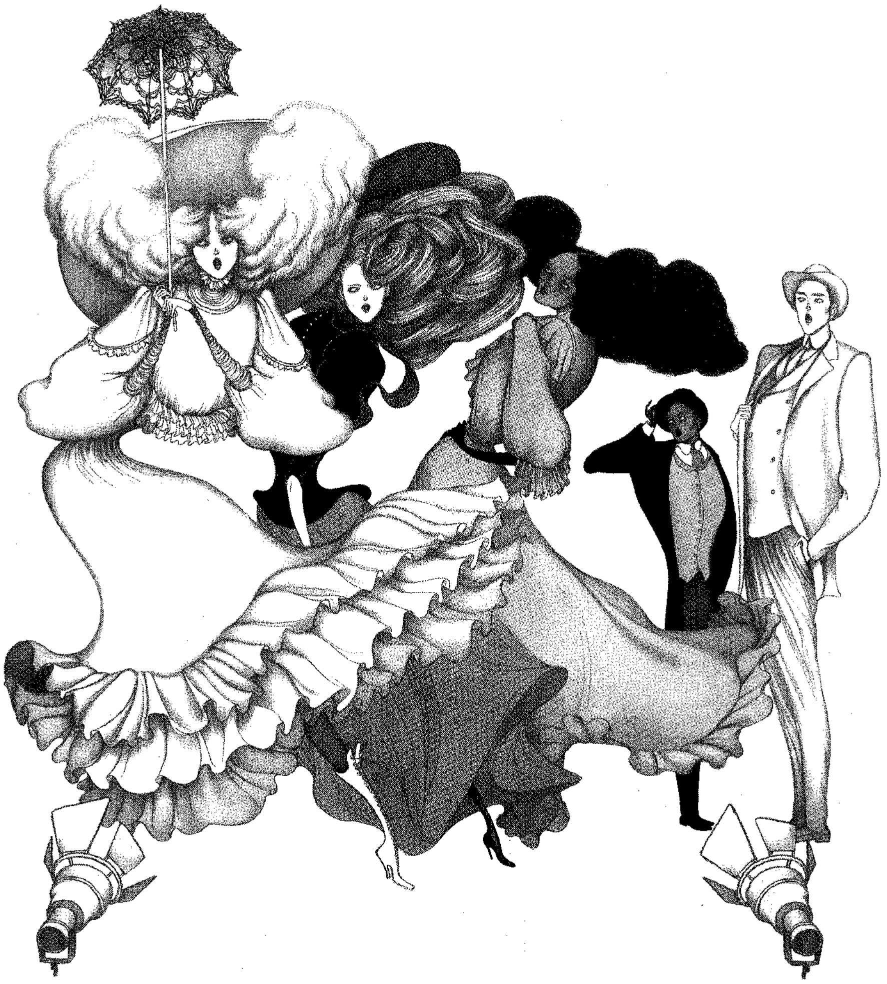
> In 1902, Father built a house at the crest of the Broadview Avenue hill in New Ro-

> chelle, New York, and it seemed for some years thereafter that all the family's days would be warm and fair.

Slowly, as though from the recesses of a sweet dream, we hear the white-clothed people of New Rochelle start to sing: "The skies were blue and hazy/Rarely a storm. Barely a chill . . . /The afternoons were lazy./Everyone warm. Everything still."

The protective haze that envelops the Little Boy and his community—particularly the men—isn't an illusion, at first. Security and order are all they know, and all they care to know. And, as the director and choreographer, Marcia Milgrom Dodge, shows us at this point in the production (and in a few subsequent scenes), white patriarchal smugness can be a form of innocence, too. But this opening scene, which runs for almost ten minutes, is the most successful of the show—and it's where we have the greatest concentration of McNally's book. Once "Ragtime" passes into Flaherty and Ahrens's hands, it becomes less a musical than a series of saccharine arias and duets that are made to carry most of the weight of exposition as well.

After the brilliant beginning, we move on to Mother singing goodbye to Father, who's leaving on an expedition to the North Pole. Soon afterward, she discovers a black baby, buried alive in her garden. (Noll expresses little surprise at this moment, or at any other; she's not an actress but a singer, who can carry the music but not the inner life of the role.) The baby belongs to Sarah (the fine Stephanie Umoh), a washerwoman, who thought it had no chance at a decent life with her. Mother decides to take both mother and child in. Father returns. Some time later, Coalhouse—a piano player from Harlem, who is the baby's father—arrives to visit, and, he hopes, reclaim his lover and child. As Coalhouse sits at the family piano one day, Grandfather asks him if he knows any "coon songs." With great deliberation, Coalhouse explains that "coon songs" are written for minstrel shows and that minstrel shows are performed by white men in blackface. What *he* plays is ragtime. On the afternoon I saw the show, Coalhouse's explanation was drowned out by the audience's laughter. The audience, it seemed, considered Grandfather's condescending racism kind of cute, the comic grumblings of a foulmouthed old man—all just part and parcel of the times, which move on to include Sarah's being beaten to death by some cops as she tries to help Coalhouse find justice, Coalhouse and Mother's Younger Brother's becoming anarchists, Mother's falling in love with a Latvian Jew named Tateh (Robert Petkoff), who eventually spirits her away from New Rochelle to live the life of a moviemaker's wife in Los Angeles, and Coalhouse's meeting Sarah in Heaven.



New Rochelle meets the new Manhattan in the musical version of Doctorow's novel.

LAURA LAINE

A similar wistfulness—a longing for a bygone era, or for one that is in the course of slipping away—turns up in many American musicals, from "Gypsy" (the death of vaudeville) to "Company" (the death of marriage). But it's to the discredit of the creators of "Ragtime" that they use the surefire manipulation of nostalgia to sweeten the bitter truths that are laced throughout Doctorow's grander vision. His story is far bloodier than what Dodge and her collaborators are willing to show, which says as much about the limitations of the American musical as anything. In the book, Doctorow talks about pre-First World War America as a place where prosperity was proved by how much offal one could consume ("There was a new President, William Howard Taft, and he took office weighing three hundred and thirty-two pounds. . . . The consumption of food was a sacrament of success. . . . America was a great farting country"). That gluttony was offset by the deep joyfulness of a shimmering, new, bastard style: ragtime, whose "clear chords hung in the air like flowers," and which took over the city, rich and poor, black and white. Instead of Doctorow's thoughtful investigation into style—political, sartorial, and otherwise—all Dodge manages to offer us at the end of this hyped extravaganza is the limp, liberal sight of Sarah's son racing into the needy, show-biz arms of his adoptive white mother. ♦

THE ART WORLD

LET IT BLEED

"1969" at P.S. 1.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

In 1969, we were very free. I turned twenty-seven—too old to be a hippie, after having been too young to pull off being a beatnik—and was so free as to be practically useless, writing just enough to finance days abed in a tiny Sullivan Street apartment, where I convalesced from many drugs, a broken marriage, and other ills of frenetic years on the downtown poetry and art scenes. I almost roused myself to attend Woodstock. Nixon became President. Vietnam churned on. Tidings of the Manson family and the Weathermen intensified a sense of concatenating disaster. Black Power, nascent feminism, and Stonewall discomfited straight white guys like me. (Being on the side of the angels is hard when the angels are mad at you.) In the art world, "New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970," which opened in 1969, at the Metropolitan Museum, and was curated by the owlish hipster Henry Geldzahler, summarized swiftly receding glories. Philip Guston, whose hypersensitive abstractions I had revered, was painting R. Crumb-like goofball imagery, for which it would take me more than a decade to forgive him. After a psychedelic efflorescence, color died. This I've confirmed on visits to "1969," a huge show of works from the Museum of Modern Art's collections, at P.S. 1, the museum's affiliate in Long Island City. A grayer affair, in mood as in hue, cannot be imagined. It vivifies a reign of asceticism that followed upon our surfeit of freedom. Spiritual hair shirts were in fashion.

"Gauze," by Bruce Nauman, and Joseph Beuys in "Soziale Plastik (Social Sculpture)," by Lutz Mommartz.

LEFT: © 2009 BRUCE NAUMAN / ARS, NY; RIGHT: COURTESY MOMA

The avant-garde movements of the time were post-minimalism and Conceptual art. Reacting against Pop and minimalism, they steered serious art into mazes of self-reference that it has not escaped to this day. (The march of progressive styles since Impressionism was over.) The year's most original artists were the post-minimalists Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra—and Eva Hesse, whose work is annoyingly absent from "1969." They founded their art in the absurdity, and the necessity, of making formal decisions. Two grainy videos show Nauman, alone in his California studio, walking with arbitrary determination and wielding a lit fluorescent tube. In a film shot with an industrial high-speed camera, he pulls his mouth agape with his fingers; in another, he yanks a streamer of gauze from his mouth. The quick gestures take something like forever in super-slow motion. "Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure," by Serra, resulted when the artist made a long, neat, crosswise stack of slabs, planks, and rolls of raw stone, wood, and lead; sawed two parallel cuts in the array, lengthwise; and then moved the severed ends away at odd angles. The sculpture, on the floor, speaks with sullen power of order and randomness and not much else. Nauman and Serra addressed a culture in which "artist" was becoming a job description, at once secure and drained of meaning. Having nothing to do, but having to do something, they made the situation clear and just a little bit dramatic.

Who could be expected to care about such stuff? People who were vocationally obliged to care. You knew them by their tendency to speak of the art world as a "community," adrift from society. Geared-up art schools, contemporary-art museums, and programs of public funding for the arts tugged artists away from the commercial market and popular audiences and into an archipelago of insular scenes. Other factors speeded the implosion. One jumps out from a distant wall, beyond a doorway, when you enter the first room of "1969": "Q. And babies? A. And babies," a photographic poster, widely distributed at the time, that pictures murdered innocents at My Lai. (It was issued by the Art Workers Coalition, an activist group whose myriad assaults on the apolitical aloofness of MOMA, including pickets and a sit-in, are documented in the show.) Disgust with America took over where traditional avant-garde contempt for the bourgeoisie had left off, a decade or so earlier, first with the triumphs of Abstract Expressionism and then with the fiesta of Pop. The embitterment of right-wing politics today isn't a patch on that of leftist temperaments in 1969—an alienation so deep as to resemble indifference, but scintillant with rage. The art world, or community, became a destination of internal exile. Art works became tests of initiation. If you wondered what they were about, it meant that you would never know.

Cleverly organized by the critic and curator Neville Wakefield, who is an adviser to P.S. 1, "1969" heralds a gathering dusk in its first room, with samples of major styles in decline. A floor piece of magnesium tiles by Carl Andre and a brassy wall unit by Donald Judd reiterate minimalism, like a bird stuck with just one song. A cartoonish drawing of a crazed face by John Wesley bids adieu to Pop. A big, remarkably drab painting by Helen Frankenthaler—a blue-gray cloudlike shape, in acrylic, soaked into a yellowing canvas—kisses off Color Field, the last ditch of modernist formalism (which Geldzahler's show vainly advanced as a wave of the future). Painting was dead in 1969. A vast sheet of paper neatly gridded with thumbprints, by Joel Shapiro, solemnizes the passing of the archaic medium of subjective expression. So do framed, wordy conceptualist japes by Robert Barry and Lee Lozano. The shamanistic German Joseph Beuys simpers in speechless closeup on a video monitor: the artist as "Social Sculpture," the tape's title postulates. Beuys was all but unknown then in New York—most of us still assumed that no art from elsewhere could really matter. (We were in for a delayed shock, with a Beuys retrospective at the Guggenheim in 1979 and, shortly thereafter, the revealed masteries of Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Anselm Kiefer, who knew everything we knew and then some.) There is a chamberlike room of high-tech, glossy, hedonistic California minimalism by Robert Irwin, John McCracken, and others who gave us pause. They seemed to come from another planet, incomprehensibly smiling.

Photography was on the rise in 1969, though still snubbed in fine-art spheres. The most energetic section of the show presents black-and-white photographs by Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and others who directed coolly formalizing eyes at the wilderness of occurring reality. (They incidentally rediscovered America, in its ceaseless weirdness and unkillable vitality.) Photography offered an escape hatch from the solipsistic funks into which so much of art was descending. How to get over oneself was the problem of the day. Snapping pictures helped. Some painters took the hint: witness Richard Hamilton's rendering of a tabloid shot of Mick Jagger under arrest, and Vija Celmins's of photographs of the lunar surface, too distant to capture the footprints of Neil Armstrong but attended by the thought of them. Among the films that are projected in the show, Andy Warhol's "Blue Movie" is no less a classic for being just about unwatchable. The actors Viva and Louis Waldon—sort of having sex and talking and talking, with miserable self-consciousness—remind me of a lot that I had blessedly forgotten about those days. In an epoch of obligatory liberation, not wanting to sleep with somebody was an unacceptable excuse.

"1969" is authentically lugubrious; the only truly depressing aspect of the show is the inclusion of new work by young artists who prove that conceptually driven art, as a phenomenon in and about institutions, has gone essentially nowhere in forty years. Stephanie Syjuco re-creates works by Beuys. Why? (Richard Pettibone's miniature repainting of a Frank Stella was already jejune in 1969.) Hank Willis Thomas reasonably—but tediously—fills in a missing African-American perspective with pieces reproducing pictures and headlines from *Ebony* and *Jet*. Messy installations by a group called the Bruce High Quality Foundation coyly critique museum functions. It seems that we'll never be permitted to graduate from the university of the obvious. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

ONLY MAKE-BELIEVE

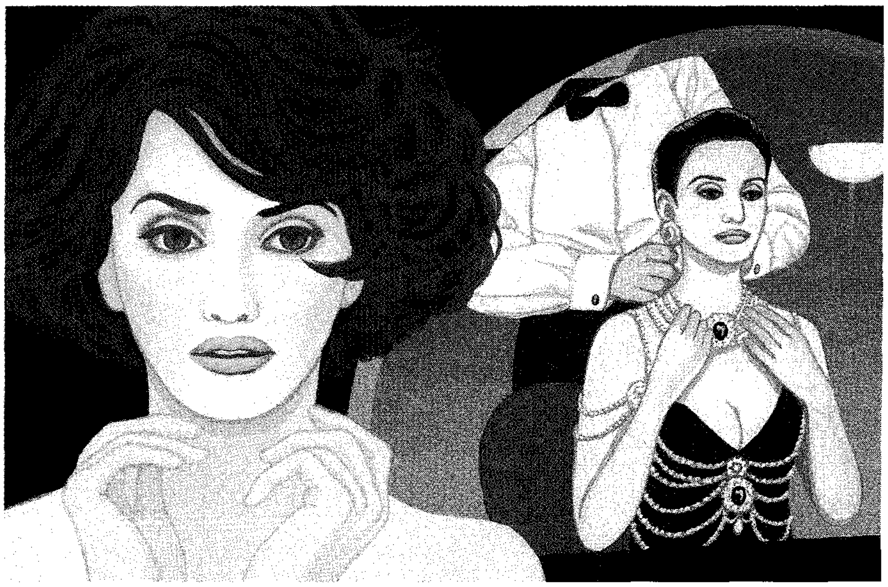
"Broken Embraces" and "2012."

BY ANTHONY LANE

How many tales are told in the course of "Broken Embraces," the new film from Pedro Almodóvar? People keep interrupting themselves, or changing direction, in order to embark upon a story. People, that is, like the screenwriter Harry Caine (Lluís Homar) and his assistant, Diego (Tamar Novas), who cannot pass a row of posters, marked with a red cross and the words "Dona Sangre," meaning "Give Blood," without starting to dream up a whole new plot about vampires working in a blood bank. Though that plot never comes to fruition, we do watch Harry and Diego as they talk up its erotic potential—simultaneously aroused and amused, like so many souls before them in the work of Almodóvar.

Harry, too, is a fiction of his own devising. "I was always tempted by the thought of being someone else," he admits in an opening voice-over. He used to be a film director named Mateo Blanco, and now he is a screenwriter, but clearly something more drastic than downsizing has occurred; it will take us the rest of the movie to discover what that was. He has also lost his sight, although I confess to a glimmer of doubt. Given his talent for invention, and the mileage that he gets from his disability in the first scene—a young woman who has helped him cross the road is invited back to his apartment, there to be swiftly seduced—you can't help wondering, for a while, if there is more to his blindness than meets the eye.

That is purest Almodóvar: his images remain as crisp as apples, with the lines of walls and furniture, not to mention bodies and the clothes that enfold them, offered with such proud and bracing clarity that it's difficult to realize—not until the movie's aftermath, perhaps—just how ambiguous the emotional life that surrounds them really is. His world is as hard to the touch as it is elusive to the understanding; there are motives that lurk and scurry behind those walls which we will never trap. Take Lena (Penélope Cruz), whom we see entirely in flashback, though she fills the movie to the brim. In the nineteen-nineties, she was first the secretary and then the mistress of Ernesto Martel (José Luis Gómez), a wealthy Madrid industrialist, whose death is announced at the start. In life, he was both devoutly pampering (we see Lena drape herself in gold, with a necklace like a boxing champion's belt) and rabidly jealous: not an unusual combination. Lena, weary of her gilded cage, tried an acting career (was she, too, impelled by "the thought of being someone else"?), and ended up in the office—then in the movie, and soon in the arms—of Mateo Blanco. Martel needed no Iago to ignite his suspicions, preferring to employ his gay son, Ernesto, Jr. (Rubén Ochandiano), to dog the secret lovers with a video camera, and a lip-reader to decipher the results.



Penélope Cruz is seen entirely in flashback in Pedro Almodóvar's new movie.

AKIKO KATO

To summarize each strand of "Broken Embraces" would take all night, and you would still have to skip the numberless rhymes and references that entangle the film. Ernesto, Jr., for example, turns up in later life calling himself Ray X: a mirror of the X-rays of Lena's bones when she takes a tumble downstairs. Meanwhile, the color red emboldens Almodóvar as it did Michael Powell, and here its dazzle leaps from shoes to shirts to blood, to a teardrop on the side of a tomato, and even to a painted crucifix on the wall of Harry's home. Powell's "Peeping Tom" receives a bow, as Lena grabs a tripod and jabs it like a sword, and homage is also paid to Rossellini, Louis Malle, and others—forerunners in that wry and mobile intensity sought by Almodóvar. (As for the hero's name: think of Michael Caine playing Harry Palmer in "The Ipcress File.") Nobody can quibble, therefore, with the patterning of intelligence in the film; to what, however, do these visual sums add up? If anything, their complexity means that, as a study of *amour fou*, "Broken Embraces" is on the chilly side. There is plenty of sex on show—or, better still, *not* on show, as two figures, swathed in bedsheets, roil and wrestle like a pair of randy ghosts—but none of it struck me as particularly *fou*, and, since Harry's rampancy was established at the beginning, his love for Lena could be just another crush. Also, Lluís Homar's charm in the principal role is of the blockish, unremarkable variety. Think back to the parts that Antonio Banderas, in his taurine youth, played for Almodóvar, and you feel tempted to ask whether, over the years, the director has, consciously or otherwise, drained some of the potency from his masculine leads, the better to yield the spotlight to his ravishing muses.

Cruz is certainly more worshipped than ever by his camera, and you have to laugh when, fresh from intercourse, with mussed hair, she stares at the bathroom mirror, as bare as a baby, and declares, "I look awful." If you say so, dear. Yet the film, like Harry, is so fixated on the perfection of her posing—on the iconography of the actress rather than on the layering of her character—that our sympathies, strongly engaged at first blush, somehow cool as the story proceeds. The multiple narratives thicken, but you can feel the blood of the movie starting to thin, and what may have been intended as a pulsing reanimation of "Vertigo"—Harry's concluding task is to remold his desires into a finished work of art, and Alberto Iglesias's music is in deep and breathless pursuit of Bernard Herrmann—seems a touch too long, too airless, and too content with its own contrivances to stir the heart. Almodóvar is like his heroine, armed with a tripod. He is a Tom who peeps and gazes but finally fails to strike home.

The best thing about time is the nick of it. Such is the binding rule of melodrama, which decrees that all escapes shall be narrow, no more than the breadth of a hair: to save oneself and others at one's leisure, with room to spare, would be an insult to the satisfaction of the moment. The rule was most famously observed by D. W. Griffith, in 1920, when, in "Way Down East," he had Richard Barthelmess pluck a supine Lillian Gish from a chunk of ice floe just before it reached the lip of a waterfall. The rhythm of the scene has never really been improved upon—Griffith even found space for some dreamy, drifting closeups of Gish, in her dead faint—and there are filmmakers working today who strive mightily to match him. Their leader is Roland Emmerich, the director of "Independence Day," "Godzilla," and now "2012," and a firm believer in the closest possible shave.

Thus, in the new film, Jackson Curtis (John Cusack) drives a limo containing his children, his ex-wife, and her boyfriend through the Los Angeles streets, which are crazing and cracking behind him. And so to the airport, where the boyfriend (Tom McCarthy), who is both a plastic surgeon (hiss!) and a novice pilot (hurrah!), jumps into a plane, accelerates along the runway—which is also caving in—with all the gang on board, and takes off by a whisker. Later, he repeats the process, as the co-pilot of a hulking Russian aircraft, which just clears a devastated Las Vegas and then just lands safely in the snows of China—or, at least, allows Jackson to drive a Bentley out of the cargo hold before the plane tips into a crevasse. Just.

By this stage, as you might expect, the law of diminishing returns is in full force. When Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum squeaked through a rapidly closing door in the side of a spaceship in "Independence Day," at least we got Smith yelling "Elvis has *left* the building!" to signal his triumph and add some comic pep, whereas the mood in "2012" veers between head-shaking doom and eye-moistening hopefulness, with nothing in between. You want to grab the entire cast and say, Come on, guys, it's not the end of the world. Just because "the biggest solar eruptions in human history" have led to "a new kind of nuclear particle" at our planet's core, meaning that "the Earth's crust is destabilizing," so what? Emmerich's people don't face apocalypse by getting drunk or having sex; they merely set about planning "the most important schedule in the history of mankind," which happens to be the most boring phrase in the history of American cinema.

"2012" is so long, and its special effects are at once so outrageous and so thunderously predictable, that by the time I lurched from the theatre I felt that three years had actually passed and that the apocalypse was due any second. Emmerich's main achievement is to take a bunch of excellent actors, including Danny Glover, Thandie Newton, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Woody Harrelson, and to prevent all of them—with the exception of Oliver Platt and a pair of giraffes—from giving a decent performance. As for the statement issued by the governor of California, in response to the catastrophe, just block your ears. Obviously, the producers couldn't hire the genuine article, so instead they looked around and found the world's worst Schwarzenegger impersonator, thus adding to the general sense of gruesome make-believe. The President of the United States informs his fellow-leaders that "the world, as we know it, will soon come to an end," but it's not the world *we* know. And there are still two and a half hours to go. That's not soon enough. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, November 22nd. The finalists in the November 9th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 7th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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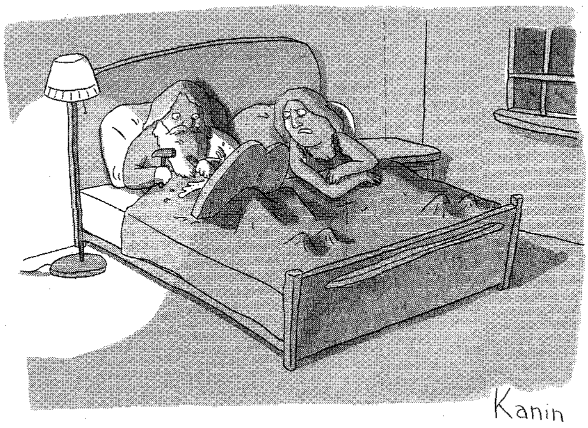
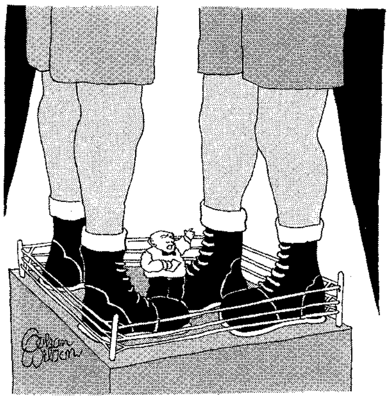


"They ignored your first ten. What makes you think you'll do any better with these?"
Bob Silverstein, Scarsdale, N.Y.



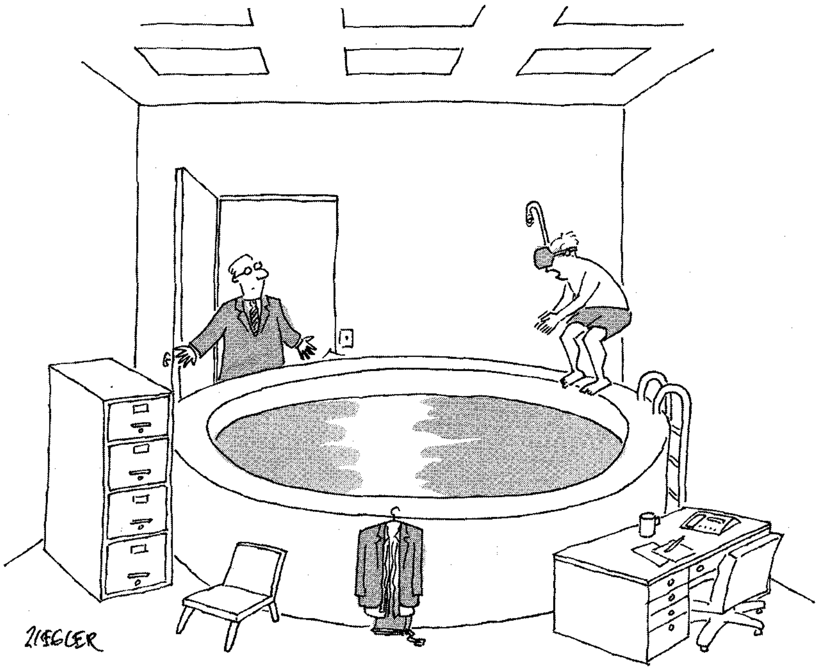
THE FINALISTS

"But, first, a word on foot odor."
Mike Egan, Syracuse, N.Y.

"And, in this corner, also hailing from Chernobyl . . ."
Tim Herbert, Plainfield, N.H.

"Very funny. Now give me the microphone."
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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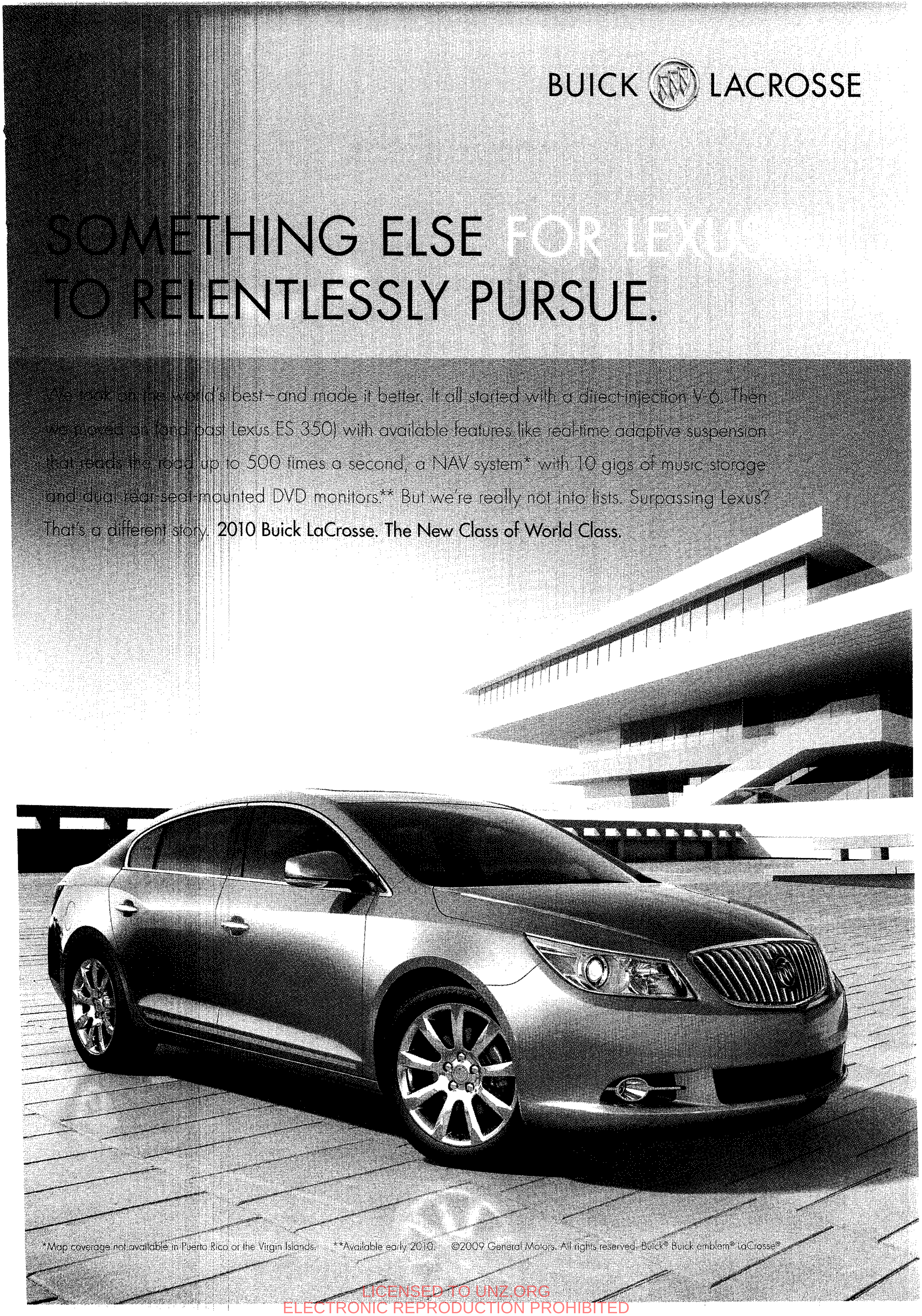

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